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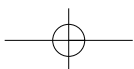
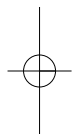
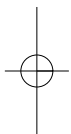
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PART III

THE AFRIKANIA MISSION



5

Afrikania Mission**'Afrikan Traditional Religion' in public****Introduction**

The bright yellow paint of the three-storey building in Sakaman, Accra, is still fresh and the gowns of the sixty men and women sitting in front of it are immaculately white (fig. 5.1). They are about to be ordained into Afrikania priesthood. All followed the two-week course offered by the recently established Afrikania Priesthood Training School. The ceremony is part of the celebrations commemorating Afrikania's 20th anniversary in March 2002. Last night the initiates participated in the 'night vigil for the nation' and tomorrow their presence will liven up the public inauguration of the new headquarters. The gathering has attracted food and ice cream sellers and there are Afrikania headscarves and badges for sale at the entrance of the premises. A special cloth with the mission logo has been printed (fig. 5.3) and a new signboard put by the roadside (fig. 5.2). Two young men are testing the public address system, 'one-two, one-two, Amen-Ra!' There are photographers, video makers and media reporters. The large group of new priests and priestesses, dressed in plain white and holding whisks, make a beautiful shot. In his welcome speech, the mission leader Osofo Ameve proudly announces that

We started very humbly, in the bush. When the first nine Afrikania priests were ordained, they were ordained in the bush, we didn't even clear the place. Twenty years after, we are ordaining sixty priests in a castle.

Then there is drumming and dancing, shouting of Afrikania slogans, and an 'opening prayer' in the form of libation to the ancestors.

Ameve and the initiates withdraw to the back of the building for 'initiation rituals.' A little later, they spectacularly reappear amidst flute music, wearing necklaces of herbs (fig. 5.4) and holding leaves between their teeth. Ameve introduces them to the public in Ewe, English, and Twi.

Today they have brought to us sixty strong men and women to be ordained into Afrikan Traditional Religion, to defend our tradition and culture.¹ They are the soldiers of our heritage. Therefore we will give them the title '*okufo*', fighter. We will ask them whether they are sincere about this task. If they are not sincere, the leaf in their mouth should stay, but if they are sincere, they should remove the leaf and answer the questions I am going to ask.

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They all vow. Then Ameve gives them a 'stone' (piece of clay) to eat, 'because they have to have a heart of stone in order to do this work,' and rubs a herbal medicine into their hair to 'make some of them wizards and some witches, for you must be a wizard to see far away, to think fast and lead the mission' (fig. 5.6). A blue strip of cloth tied to their gowns symbolises their new priestly status. To complete the ceremony, an elder priest blesses their whisks to enhance their spiritual power. Some have not bought one yet and have their handkerchief blessed instead. Afterwards they all pose for a photo session (fig. 5.5). Equipped with a little basic knowledge about the Afrikania Mission, a blessed whisk, a white gown, and a new title, they are now ready to go out to the rural areas and start an Afrikania branch on their own.

Having just arrived 'in the field,' I wondered what to make of this intriguing formulation of African tradition. How to reconcile the newness of it all – the new 'castle,' the new school, the new signboard, the new cloth and gadgets, the new priests and their newly invented title – with the constant claims to and symbols of tradition and African religious culture? At first sight I was tempted to conclude that this was an invented public performance lacking any spiritual significance and having nothing to do at all with what goes on in 'real shrines' where 'real traditional priests' are 'really initiated' into the secrets of ancient religious cults. Or, that the public part of the ceremony in front of the building was 'just entertainment,' while what happened behind it was what really mattered. After many years of training in critical anthropology, I did certainly not subscribe to a notion of tradition as located in the past and as opposed to modernity. And yet, when confronted with a performance of tradition that was clearly a new invention, I nonetheless tended to oppose it to something 'really traditional,' and less public. Clearly, Hobsbawm and Rangers' distinction between 'invented traditions,' that are typical of the modern era (1983:13), and 'genuine traditions' (ibid.:8) implicitly shaped my first impression.

This chapter addresses the Afrikania Mission's dilemma of 'modernising' 'Afrikan Traditional Religion' (ATR) and reviving it in a public sphere that is dominated by Christian voices and formats. The question of how to be an African and a modern religion at the same time has long occupied indigenous, including Christian, religious movements and is also central to Mensa Otabil's theology elaborated in chapter 2. Interestingly, Afrikania's project is similar to Otabil's. Both are committed to the mental liberation of Africans (including their descendants elsewhere in the world) and look for answers to the question of Africanness and modernity. The ways in which they work this out, however, are entirely different and their positions are often diametrically opposed to each other, especially on matters of 'tradition,' 'culture,' 'Africanness' and 'foreignness.' While Otabil propagates an African Christianity, Afrikania's answer is that one can never be African and Christian at the same time, because it sees Christianity as 'inherently foreign to Afrikans.' The movement thus aims at countering the hegemony of Christianity with a modernised version of 'the religion of Afrika.' In this project, however, it finds itself caught between the dominant, Christian formats and styles of representing religion in Ghana's public sphere and the shrine priests and priestesses in the rural areas, whom it claims to represent and tries to mobilise as keepers of 'the real thing.' The next chapter

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Fig. 5.1 Ordination of Afrikania priests at the Mission Headquarters (March 2002).

deals with the tensions that this produces in Afrikania's relationship with traditional priests and priestesses. First, however, it is necessary to examine in detail Afrikania's reformulation of ATR and its relationship to Christianity. This chapter analyses Afrikania's creation of a religious format for a nationalist purpose and its growing public presence and establish-

ment as a religious organisation. It argues that this process entails a 'protestantisation' of traditional religion. I will show how, in the process of reforming ATR for a public purpose, Christianity, in its changing dominant forms, has provided the format for Afrikania at the same time as being cast as its 'Other,' legitimising Afrikania's claims to Africanness. Afrikania seeks recognition for ATR by presenting it as essentially similar to Christianity. The authority of its claims to Africanness, however, rests on presenting it as essentially opposed to Christianity and the West, that is, on processes of Othering that are very simi-

Fig. 5.2 Afrikania Mission signboard along Winneba Road, Accra.



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Fig. 5.3 New Afrikania priest posing with the author in front of Afrikania fence wall.



Fig. 5.4 Osofo Adzovi and Osofo Komla Matrevi after the 'initiation rituals'.



Fig. 5.5 Newly ordained Afrikania priests and priestesses posing for a photo session.

lar to that of missionary ethnography, early anthropology, and also later anthropology, despite the impact of the literary turn (Fabian 1983; Said 1978). The irony of Afrikania's project, then, is a double one. As the public face of ATR in Ghana, it has become far removed from existing religious traditions and many shrine priests contest Afrikania's

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claims to be representing them. And while struggling against the dominant discursive framework that does not allow African traditionalists to be modern *and* African, it has got stuck in this very dualism.²

The first point of this chapter is to situate Afrikania's struggle for ATR in a genealogy of conceptualising 'Africa,' 'tradition,' and 'religion,' that can be traced back to the earliest encounter between Europeans and Africans on the West African coast. A discussion of this genealogy makes clear how 'African traditional religion' never existed by itself, but only in what Jean and John Comaroff (1991) have termed a 'long conversation,' an intercultural dialogical exchange with other discourses, first of all with (missionary) Christianity, but also with colonialism and anthropology. An analysis of local notions of African tradition, such as Afrikania's, alerts us to the legacy of missionaries, colonizers, and anthropologists in those places of the world that they sought to transform, dominate, and order with their concepts and categories. Such an analysis points to the resilience of constructions of 'culture' and 'tradition' in people's own struggles for and over Africanness. It shows how much current local debates are locked up in the Western-modernity-versus-African-tradition paradigm generated by the long conversation between Europeans and Africans. This makes it hard for Afrikania to present its religion as modern and African at once.

The second point is to examine the new directions Afrikania has recently taken and to place these in the wider context of the shifting relations between the Ghanaian state, religion, and the media described in chapter 1. The first ten years of the movement's history are well documented in several studies and articles on Afrikania (Asare Opoku 1993; Boogaard 1993; Gyanfosu 1995, 2002; Schirripa 2000). Especially Pauline Boogaard's in-depth study is of immense value and I will draw upon her work repeatedly. Afrikania's developments since the 1990s, however, remain hardly documented. They are significant especially in relation to the current political, religious, and media climate. At this particular historical moment Pentecostalism reigns supreme in Ghana's public sphere and it can be argued that its success ultimately depends on its insistence that African spirits are real and to be taken seriously. Despite Pentecostalism's negative stance towards these spirits, I contend that its widely publicised emphasis on spiritual power drives Afrikania closer to shrines and their occupation with spirits and powers. From its foundation, Afrikania's approach to traditional religion has been (and still is) mainly intellectualist and hardly left room for a more embodied, experience-oriented engagement with the spiritual (a tension to be worked out in the next chapter). Its primary concern with 'representation' put Afrikania in a weak position vis-à-vis Pentecostalism, which does offer modes of dealing with the 'presence' of spiritual power. Recent developments in Afrikania indicate that the movement now also offers more room for spiritual practices and experiences, such as 'all night prayer meetings,' spiritual consultation, and healing, and increasingly claims having access to spiritual powers.

An Afrikania service

The first time I attended an Afrikania service was on 21 July 2001, when I had just arrived in Accra for a pilot study. A few days before I had visited Osofo Ameve in his



Fig. 5.6 Scenes from the ordination of Afrikania priests and priestesses.

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brand-new office to introduce myself, explain the objectives of my research, and ask his permission to hang around for a year. He had warmly welcomed me and invited me to the worship service, Sunday at 10 am in the hall downstairs. Since the new building was completed, this had become the main congregation. The old congregation at the Arts Centre downtown was also still active, as were twenty branches in the rest of the country and four overseas. That following Sunday morning I encountered just a handful of people. Whom were those huge loudspeakers outside meant for then? As drumming went on some twenty more people dropped in. On arrival they dipped their thumb in a bowl with water and herbs standing at the entrance and made a circle on their forehead. An Afrikania version of the Catholic holy-water font and the cross? The *puduo* symbol of God's infinity, I was told later. The congregants (fig. 5.8) gave me a first impression of the wide variety of people that make up Afrikania's membership and audience: elderly and middle-aged men, some in trousers and shirt, others in traditional cloth and wrist beads; women in beautiful wax print outfits, western dresses, or the white calico and beads typical of shrine priestesses; children of all ages and young people.³ They all sat down on white plastic chairs facing the altar: a wooden table covered with an Afrikania print cloth and decorated with a Ghanaian flag, bronze statues of King Akhnaton and Queen Nfertiti of Egypt and two colourful plastic plants. An Afrikania priest nicknamed Obibini Kronkron ('Holy Blackman') and the mission's secretary Mama sat behind the table. I wondered where Osofo Ameve was.

Around 11 am the officiating priest silenced the drummers, beat the bell and called 'agoo!' 'Ameel!' responded the congregation. 'In the Name of Ra, our Supreme Creator and Father,' he called them to attention and commitment. Then Ameve descended the stairs and while the people sang *nsuo ye aduro* (water is medicine) he blessed them with sacred water from a calabash, to which they reacted with the *puduo* sign again. It all seemed to me very routine, perfunctory almost. The way the worshippers responded 'Amen!' to the priest shouting 'Amen-Ra!' and 'Biribi wò ho!' to 'Sankofa!' (Go back to fetch it! – There is something there!), resembled the hal-lлуйah-amens in charismatic churches, but lacked the fervour of charismatic shouting. Only during the drumming slots, when children, women and men took turns in dancing in small groups, could I sense excitement and spontaneity. Indeed, the whole liturgy was printed out, including the opening prayer. Obibini Kronkron read it out:

Father of mercy Ra, we thank you for bringing us together at this hour to pray and glorify your name. Father, we plead for forgiveness for sins that we have committed against you, your creation, and humanity. We humbly bow at your feet and call upon you, oh Ra, to have mercy on us and forgive us our sins. We call upon the divine spirits that you have created and put in charge of this land on which we now stand, these gods who are in Your Obedient Service, join us and guide us and in communion with us convey our prayers and pleadings to you. Amen-Ra! - *Amen!* -

The prayer struck me as very Christian in form, with phrases that are standard discourse in Christian prayers, whether in churches, or at private gatherings. At the same

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Fig. 5.7 Hunua Akakpo reading from the Divine Acts during an Afrikania Sunday service.



Fig. 5.8 Members of the Afrikania Mission during a Sunday service.

time the calling on the Egyptian Sun God Ra puzzled me. The libation one of the shrine priests performed appeared at first sight much closer to traditional forms of prayer, except for the pouring of water instead of the usual 'schnapps.' In his prayer he called on Akhnaton and Imhotep, but also on the legendary Asante priest Okomfo Anokye, Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah, and Afrikania's founder Osofo Damuah.

Like in a Catholic mass, one of the congregants was called upon to 'give us a reading from our bible, the *Divine Acts*' (fig. 5.7, 5.9), a book Ameve wrote in 2000. A

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young lady took place behind the pulpit and monotonously read out the seven 'Proclamations,' starting with 'There is only one Supreme God.' The reading was translated into Twi and Ewe. Then Osofo Ameve stood up to preach, also both in Twi and in Ewe. He introduced me and boosted people's pride of 'this new branch called headquarters,' the new office, and the new school. He expressed his worry about the small number of people that came today and about their coming so late. He urged them 'to be very serious about our tradition,' but what exactly that was did not become very clear. When he finished, Obibini Kronkron took the microphone and said in English: 'I thank His Holiness for his words. And I want to let Osofo know that we have heard you and we shall follow you. Because of you we are here. Amen-Ra!' 'Amen!' responded the congregation.

The drummers started a stirring rhythm and the worshippers lined up to dance around a plastic bowl in the middle while dropping some coins or a note in it. Then Osofo Atsu Kove raised the bowl and prayed over the money.⁴ At the end of the service it was announced that this week's 'offertory' mounted to 96,000 cedis (about \$ 14). If all Afrikania's money came from the membership, as Ameve had proudly told me, and this was what members donated on an average Sunday, how could the movement not only survive, but also build these impressive headquarters? I was yet to find out that Afrikania's main source of money was Ameve's private pocket.

After welcoming six visitors, a couple of announcements, and lastly, benediction by Ameve, drumming went on till the end. As people shook hands, exchanged a few words, and departed, one woman in plain white cloth and white beads started dancing vigorously and her eyes started rolling. Two other women quickly calmed her. No one else paid attention. It was the only instance during the two-hour service that I felt that something powerful was going on and it was suppressed at that very moment. Only once more during the over thirty services that I attended over the course of my fieldwork did I see someone showing signs of spirit possession. Afrikania's ambiguous relationship with the spiritual, and especially spirit possession, will be discussed in the next chapter. This chapter examines what struck me most during that first service: the movement's constant use of Christian formats. A sketch of the genealogy of the concept of 'African traditional religion' will place this discussion in historical perspective.

Conceptualising 'African traditional religion'

In chapter 1 I have identified two dominant modes of representing 'African traditional religion' in Ghana's public sphere. While the nationalist *Sankofa* ideology represents it as a positive force and a source of African identity, Pentecostalism represents it as a negative and dangerous one, a source of evil power. Both, however, place traditional religion in direct opposition to Christianity, framing it in the dualism of tradition and modernity that is as old as the encounter between Africa and Europe.

The point in this section is not to deconstruct the imaginary and thus misleading category of 'African traditional religion' and to unmask it as a historical and politically charged construction. That argument has been well established by others (e.g. Chidester

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1996; Meyer 1999; Peel 1990, 1994; Ranger 1988; Shaw 1990) and does not need to be repeated here. Instead, I wish to point out how this historical construction has influenced contemporary Ghanaian imaginations of African traditional religion, and that presented by the Afrikania Mission in particular. The aim of this section is to identify historical discourses and practices that contributed to the construction of ATR as a category and that have a direct or less direct bearing on Afrikania's project of reforming and promoting ATR. It thus sketches some genealogical roots of the idea of ATR that will resurface in the next section's account of the history of the Afrikania Mission.

Various, often intersecting discourses and practices have contributed to the conceptualisation of African traditional religion. Early travellers, Christian missions and African indigenous churches, anthropologists, the colonial and postcolonial state, Pan-Africanism, and, more recently, global and local media all participated in the 'long conversation' between Africa and Europe that shaped notions of 'Africa,' 'tradition,' 'culture,' and 'religion.' Before turning to the conceptualisation of 'African traditional religion,' let me take the three components of that notion separately.

The imagination of Africa

It is now common to say in Africanist circles that Africa does not exist. As various Africanist scholars have argued, 'Africa' is an invention (Mudimbe 1988; Appiah 1992), an idea (Mudimbe 1994), an imagination (Coombes 1995; Mbembe 2002), a construction that does not exist outside the discourses that produce(d) it. As Achille Mbembe (2002:257) put it, 'Africa as such exists only on the basis of the text that constructs it as the Other's fiction.' From their first arrival on the African continent, Europeans produced essentialist notions of 'Africa,' that have profoundly influenced contemporary ideas, including Afrikania's, about 'Africanness' and about what it means to be 'African.' As such, the idea of 'Africa' is intimately tied up with questions of knowledge and power (Mudimbe 1988). Eighteenth century traders, nineteenth century missionaries, and late nineteenth-early twentieth century colonial officials all produced accounts of 'Africa' and 'the African' to legitimise the superiority of white over black people and to justify their respective projects of slave trade, conversion to Christianity, and colonial domination. Depictions of Africa as a 'dark continent' and its inhabitants as 'savage,' 'barbaric,' 'primitive,' or 'child-like' were founded on the notion of race and on the premise of a natural inferiority of the black race. In contrast, many early anthropologists' and travellers' accounts conveyed a romantic idea of 'Africa' and 'the African' as still possessing an authenticity that the civilised, modern Westerner had lost (Lindholm 2002). What the negative, denigrating and the positive, romantic discourses about Africa and Africans had in common, however, was that both constructed the African as the fundamental Other to the European and posed an essential difference between Africa and Europe. 'African' thus became equal to exotic, to a distance in time and space that constructed the Other as the object of anthropology (Fabian 1983, 2000). Even if this Western invented notion of an 'authentic' Africa is now rare in anthropology, similar expectations of Africanness as otherness still persist today in for example the tourist, music and art industries.

The a-historical and often racial notion of Africa that characterised European discourses about Africa was taken up by Pan-Africanism. Anthony Appiah (1992)

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argues that African-American Pan-Africanists such as Crummel, Blyden, and Du Bois took for granted the essential distinction between the black and the white race used to justify the colonisation of Africa. They thus not only accepted the very terms of the ideology of the domination of Africans, but also set the tone of the debate on African identity in Africa. Surely, the invention of Africa is not exclusively an outsiders' affair – European or African-American. For a long time Africans have been thinking about Africanness and Africa. Both Appiah (1992) and Mbembe (2002) have critiqued the long debate among African intellectuals about Africanity and the meaning of being African. Appiah states that despite Pan-Africanism's positive valuation of the black race, the acceptance of the dichotomy of 'blacks' versus 'whites' entails an untenable notion of race and prevents African intellectuals from appreciating the rich and complex cultural 'syncretisms' resulting from Africans' contacts with other people. Mbembe similarly argues that instead of radically criticising colonial assumptions, African discourses of the self developed within the racist paradigm, reappropriating the fundamental categories of the Western discourse they claim to oppose and reproducing their dichotomies. 'Nativist' and 'Afro-radicalist' narratives have driven African scholarship to 'a dead end' that can only lament the effects of the West's contamination of a pure 'Africanness.'

Anti-colonial and nationalist movements in many parts of Africa also drew upon the ideology of Pan-Africanism. Their search for cultural identity and emphasis on Africanness were part of a political struggle for independence and of building new nation-states. But it was also the flip side of a long history of being Othered. Mobutu's project of promoting 'African authenticity' is a case in point. In Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah spoke of 'African personality.' Much later, Jerry Rawlings' military coup of 1981 included a 'cultural revolution,' a return to the nation's cultural roots. Such political quests for Africanness had a religious counterpart in, for example, the rise of so-called African Independent Churches (Fernandez 1978; Meyer 2004b) or the move towards 'enculturation' or 'Africanisation' in the Catholic Church in Africa (Pobee 1988). These were reactions against the 'foreignness' of missionary Christianity. The Afrikania Mission can be placed in this tradition. As we shall see in the next section, African-American Pan-Africanist thinking, Rawlings' emphasis on Africanness, and the 'Africanisation' movement within the Catholic Church all had a direct bearing on Damuah's foundation of the Afrikania Mission.

The imagination of tradition

The imagination of Africa has been closely linked to the notion of tradition. The idea that African societies are dominated by tradition whereas Western societies are dominated by rational modernity has long characterized Western social thought and the study of African culture, religion, and ritual in particular (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993:xv; see also Steegstra 2004). 'Tradition,' then, has come to be inseparable from 'modernity,' and the 'self-sustaining antinomy' (ibid.:xii) between 'traditional African' societies and 'modern European civilization' underpins the long-standing European myth of modernization as linear progress that denies Europe's Others their part in a shared history. Since Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's

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pioneering work on the invention of tradition (1983), anthropological and historical research has come to focus instead on how 'traditions' are constructed as part of modernist projects of missionary work, colonialism, and post-colonial nationalism. Yet, Hobsbawm and Ranger's distinction between 'invented traditions' and 'genuine traditions' still resonates in much work on tradition (e.g. Otto and Pederson 2000). Ranger himself later critiqued the notion of invention and found the notion of 'imagination of tradition' more historically appropriate (1993). However, the discursive framework that parallels an opposition of invented to genuine, with that of modernity to tradition proves hard to eradicate. This modernist dichotomy fails to notice that 'genuine tradition,' including 'African traditional religion,' is equally constructed as modernity's Other in the historical dialogue between 'The West' and 'The Rest.' Moreover, the constructivist approach of many invention-of-tradition studies has been critiqued for its overemphasis on 'creation' and 'make-believe.'⁵ It tends to overlook not only cultural continuities with the past, but also the fact that despite their 'invented' nature, 'traditions' do have a very real and powerful appeal locally and indeed constitute life worlds (Steegstra 2004; Coe 2005). Instead of unmasking Afrikania's performance of tradition as a modern, urban invention and opposing it to a supposedly 'real tradition' of rural villages and shrines, I place it in the local genealogy of discourses about tradition in which shrines figure both as conversation partners and as points of reference, but not as loci of tradition in and of itself.

In Ghana, as in many parts of Africa, the essentialist notion of 'tradition' (and its sister notion of 'culture') developed by missionaries, anthropologists and colonizers has been appropriated by the postcolonial state for the project of building an independent nation. As described in chapter 1, in its search for an African national identity, the Ghanaian state promoted a cultural ideology of *Sankofa* – taking on from tradition – and stimulated celebration of traditional festivals, media production on culture and tradition, research on Ghanaian traditions in African Studies departments of national universities, and education of 'culture and tradition' at public schools. In her excellent study of the 'dilemma of culture' in Ghanaian schools, Cati Coe (2005) reveals that the Ghanaian state's effort to forge a national culture through its schools has created a paradox: while Ghana encourages its educators to teach about local cultural traditions, those traditions are transformed, objectified and nationalized as they are taught in school classrooms.

As will be recalled from chapter 2, Mensa Otabil heavily critiqued the public, intellectual discourse on 'tradition' and 'Africanness,' that places both in the past and reproduces the age-old African-tradition-versus-Western-modernity paradigm. The Afrikania Mission relates to this ongoing debate in a very different way. As the next section will show, Afrikania's struggle for African tradition can be traced directly to the state's cultural ideology and the intellectualist, symbolic approach to African tradition that dominates African scholarship and the educational curriculum. At first sight its reformulation of 'Afrikan Traditional Religion' as a modern religion seems to defy the tradition-modernity dualism. Yet, as I will argue, it remains trapped in this Western framework that has shaped the construction of 'African' and 'tradition' as Otherness in the history of the encounter between Africa

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and Europe and still determines the 'limits of the discursive space' (Steegstra 2004) within which Ghanaians make sense of the world.

The imagination of religion

We now have to consider the genealogy of the notions of 'religion' and 'religions.' As several scholars of religion have argued, these concepts cannot be taken for granted, because, like the concepts of 'Africa' and 'tradition,' they emerged out of the encounter between Christianity and other religions on colonial frontiers (Asad 1993; Chidester 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Meyer 1999; Peel 1990). Failure to recognise this would blind us not only for the unequal relations of power inherent in the very concept of religion, but also for the contemporary consequences of this history for representations of African traditional religion such as those discussed here.

As David Chidester points out in his brilliant study of the emergence of the conceptual categories of 'religion' and 'religions' on colonial South African frontiers (1996), throughout the past centuries travellers, Christian missionaries, ethnographers, and colonial officials all generated knowledge about religion and religions and thus participated in practices of comparative religion on the front lines of intercultural contact (ibid.:10). 'They practiced comparisons that mediated between the familiar and the strange, producing knowledge about the definition and nature, the taxonomy, genealogy, and morphology of the human phenomenon of religion' (ibid.:11). Thereby they not only interpreted the practices of the African people they encountered within the known framework of Christianity, but in this process of 'discovering' indigenous religions also reinvented all the religions of the world. I put discovering between inverted commas, because, as Chidester argues, 'we cannot assume that some "real" religion waited to be discovered, since the very terms *religion* and *religions* were products of the colonial situation' (ibid.:16).⁶ Moreover, the discovery of an indigenous religious system depended upon colonial conquest and domination. Before coming under colonial subjugation, Africans were thought to have no religion; once local control was established, an indigenous population was found to have its own religious system after all. Similar practices of religious comparison and translation between indigenous religious practices and Christianity took place in West Africa, as Birgit Meyer has shown in the case of the Peki Ewe (1999) and John Peel in the case of the Yoruba (1990, 2000). In the former case, Meyer argues that the historical encounter between Pietist missionaries and Ewe people involved both the diabolisation of indigenous religious practice and the translation of the Pietist message into its language, thus integrating Ewe concepts into Christianity while at the same time drawing a strict boundary between Christianity and Ewe religion. In his analysis of the encounter between missionaries and Yoruba *Ifa* diviners in the nineteenth century, Peel observes that missionary agendas depended upon the construction of homologies between Christianity and Yoruba 'heathendom.'

From the arrival of early missionaries, travellers and ethnographers, then, throughout the colonial era and beyond, African religious practice has been historically constructed as 'fetishist,' 'primitive,' 'animistic,' 'magical' or 'traditional' in opposition to modern and Christian, and shrine priests have had to defend their practice by

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referring to Christianity. At the same time, through comparison, taxonomy and the construction of homologies indigenous religious practices were presented in accordance with Christian understandings of the essential features of 'religion,' a system of representations with regard to God that was shared by believers (Meyer 1999:62). The reification of what ultimately came to be known as 'African Traditional Religion' was largely the product of 'the paradigmatic status accorded in religious studies to the Judeo-Christian tradition and of the associated view of "religion as text"' (Shaw 1990:339), both within Western and African universities (see also Ranger 1988). Rosalind Shaw (1990) argues that while Geoffrey Parrinder (1954) gave the term 'African Traditional Religion' its hegemony within African religious studies, it were African scholars of African religions in the pan-African movement of cultural nationalism during the 1950s and 1960s that had the most enduring impact. Works such as those by the Nigerian scholar E. Bolaji Idowu (1962, 1973) and the Kenyan theologian John Mbiti (1969, 1970) constructed 'African Traditional Religion' as a single, pan-African belief system comparable and equivalent to Christianity. In Ghana, the works of J.B. Danquah (1944) and Kofi Asare Opoku (1978) are significant in this respect. As a result of their Christian definition of religion, such studies give priority to 'belief' and 'cosmology' over action and practice. They especially emphasise African concepts of a High God and some make claims to monotheism (Idowu 1973). African religious studies created an authorised version of indigenous religions as 'African Traditional Religion' that is still strongly hegemonic and transmitted through school texts books, the media, and other public channels. More than a century after missionaries started constructing homologies between Christianity and African religions, this version is still characterised by very similar practices of selection and translation.

The genealogy of 'African Traditional Religion' sketched in this section has created a paradox of 'otherness' and 'sameness.' On the one hand, the dualisms of African versus Western, traditional versus modern, and traditional religion versus Christianity still shape the discursive frame and terminology in which, in Ghana and throughout Africa, debates on tradition, culture and Africanness are cast (even though these dualisms have been deconstructed by Africanist scholars). Up till today, any talk about 'traditional religion' in Ghana, both popular and intellectual, both pro- and contra-tradition, seems to be stuck in this modernist framework that relegates 'African tradition' to a distant past 'before the white man came' and presents it as opposite to Western, modern, and Christian. On the other hand, however, Africanist theology created an authoritative version of ATR that depends instead on sameness in relation to Western Christian religious forms and values African religion (only) by the grace of such sameness. This paradox of presenting African religious practices as both other and same vis-à-vis Christianity is central to Afrikania's reconstruction of ATR.

Three Afrikania leaders, three approaches to ATR

This section presents a history of the Afrikania Mission. It highlights how Afrikania's three subsequent leaders have struggled for an African religious and cultural identity, and in this struggle have engaged in the above described 'long conversation' that con-

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structured religious practices in Africa as ATR. In particular, it points out how they have related, each in different ways, to Christianity and to the Ghanaian state.

The Afrikania Mission is well aware and highly critical of Christianity's and anthropology's legacy in current representations of African religions, as speaks from its 'Holy Scriptures,' *The Divine Acts*.

At first, some scholars [...] gave Afrikan religions terms that were derogatory and prejudicial. For example, terms such as animism, Totemism, Fetishism, Paganism were used to describe the religious beliefs of the people of Afrika. The term animism in particular was invented by the English anthropologist E.B. Tylor who used it first in an article in 1866 and later in his book in 1871. Tylor's ideas were popularised by his disciples and the term Animism was widely used to describe Afrikan religion. The writings of these strangers who knew very little about the Afrikan subjected the Afrikan religion to a great deal of misinterpretation, misrepresentation, and misunderstanding. [...] The Religion of Afrika is not Fetish (Ameve n.d.:12-13).

Today Afrikania criticises charismatic-Pentecostal churches for using exactly the same derogatory terms to describe ATR. To counter the charismatic Christian hegemony, its negative representation of African tradition as 'fetish' or 'juju,' and its monopoly over modernity, the Afrikania Mission aims at reconstructing ATR as an equally modern religion to serve as a source of Afrikan pride and strength and as a religious base for political nationalism and pan-Africanism. Afrikania emphasises cultural renaissance and strives for mental and spiritual emancipation of the black race and the development of the Ghanaian nation and the African continent. It believes that Christianity can never be a base for that, because Christianity is not only 'inherently foreign to Afrikans,' but also the religion used to 'oppress and exploit Afrikans.' Although after the death of the founder there has been an internal conflict over whether Afrikania was meant to be an African form of Christianity or a non-Christian African religion, Afrikania now takes an explicit non-Christian stance and fights for the public recognition of ATR as a world religion in its own right. In order to 'reorganise, reactivate, rehabilitate, reform, and modernise traditional religion to make it relevant to our times' (Damuah 1982) and to 'build in the Afrikan a spirit of self-realisation and self-consciousness' (Ibid.1984), the movement seeks to mobilise and bring together all different cults and shrines in the country, and ultimately, the continent.

Osofo Komfo Damuah and the early Afrikania Mission

In the abovementioned studies of the Afrikania Mission two aspects appear central to the foundation of the movement in 1982: the historical and political connection with Flight-Lieutenant J.J. Rawlings' 31st December Revolution in 1981 and the Catholic background of the founder Kwabena Damuah. Both have shaped Afrikania's representations of ATR. After seven years working as a Roman Catholic priest, in 1964 Damuah went to the United States to further his studies, resulting in a Ph.D. in theology at Howard University.⁷ It was during this twelve year study and teaching stay in

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the US that he got inspired by the African-American emancipation movement and issues of Black experience, Black Power, identity and dignity. When he came back to Ghana in 1976, many saw him as a 'controversial revolutionary' and a 'rebel' and his pleas for spiritual renewal and enculturation brought him into conflict with his bishop (Gyanfosu 1995). A few years later Rawlings invited him to take part in his revolutionary Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). Damuah accepted, against the wish of the Catholic bishops, but left the government not long afterwards to concentrate on the spiritual, cultural, religious, and moral aspects of nation building. On 22 December 1982, he officially resigned from the Catholic Church and inaugurated the Afrikania Mission with a press conference at the Arts Centre (now Centre for National Culture) in downtown Accra. The following Sunday, 26 December, Afrikania was 'spiritually outdoored' (Gyanfosu 2002:273) with a worship service at the same venue. After these two widely publicised events, Damuah and his handful of followers started a nation-wide 'crusade' to spread Afrikania's message and open branches in all of the country's regions. This effort seemed very successful, as in less than a year Damuah claimed branches in all the ten regions of Ghana, in four African countries, in two European countries and two branches in the USA (ibid.). Yet, what constituted a 'branch' and how sustainable these 'branches' were, remained unclear. Indeed, many of the rural 'branches' died a silent death.

Damuah's main strategies of mobilization and public representation were writing tracts, giving speeches and organizing rallies that were reminiscent of political ones, and a weekly radio broadcast replete with revolutionary rhetoric. Apart from travelling throughout the country, Afrikania engaged in the publication of pamphlets written by Damuah, Ameve or other core leaders (e.g. Damuah 1982, 1984). It also published its own newspaper, the *Afrikania Voice*, although this was very irregular and only a few issues appeared. From 1986 Afrikania was granted free airtime and had a weekly radio broadcast on GBC2, the English language station. Although Damuah wanted to reach the non-English-speaking populations, he did not get airtime on GBC1, the station used for local language programming. In chapter 8 I will elaborate on the media strategies and formats Damuah employed. From 1989 Afrikania organized monthly 'Cultural Awareness Programmes' in various parts of the country (Boogaard 1993:40). Starting Saturday evening, local traditional priests and musical groups were asked to drum, sing, and dance to attract the attention of the population. The next day would be filled with speeches by Afrikania leaders (mostly from Accra) and dignitaries (the local PNDC secretary, other state functionaries, or important chiefs), alternated with traditional music and dance. Logistical support for such events (chairs, canopies, PA system, loudspeaker van) came from local CDR's (Committee for the Defence of the Revolution).

What is important to stress here is that Afrikania depended for its public representation largely on Damuah's relationship with Rawlings. As a result, the Afrikania Mission was widely perceived as the cultural-religious corollary of the Revolution (Gyanfosu 2002:271). Indeed, Rawlings supported Damuah with a car, a public address system, a press conference (at Afrikania's inauguration), and airtime on state radio. His moral support consisted of frequent visits to Afrikania's services and encouraging speeches (Boogaard 1993:35). Afrikania was an explicit nationalist move-

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ment with a strong political vision on African identity and national development and shared the radical anti-Western and anti-Christian ideology of the Revolution. Yet, the common ideals and Rawlings' support, especially in the beginning, did not mean that the movement received broad support from the PNDC-government. The Christian majority of the PNDC was very suspicious of Afrikania and Rawlings' public sympathy for Afrikania soon decreased, apparently after he had been put on the carpet by his party (Ibid.). Nevertheless, in the perception of the public, including local administrators, Afrikania remained strongly connected to the PNDC.

The PNDC-Revolution under the leadership of the charismatic and populist Jerry John Rawlings was a turning point in the nationalist crisis caused by corruption, incompetence, and mismanagement of the previous regimes. Committed to 'people's participatory democracy,' the new government's decentralisation politics, aimed at actively engaging the people in the project of nation building and development, revived, initially, nationalist ideals among broad strata of the population. Popular enthusiasm for the Revolution soon decreased when severe economic problems forced the PNDC to take unpopular measures. Damuah wanted to carry the new nationalist moral further and give it a religious inspiration to create a deeper motivation. According to him, 'religion and nation building should always go together. Our national duty is a religious duty and every good thing we do is a prayer and service to God' (cited in Boogaard 1993:148). The two routes he saw to nation building were, first, mental decolonisation, or liberation of 'mental slavery,' and secondly, practice-oriented religion concerned with development and solving the problems faced in Ghana here and now. The cultural, religious, and spiritual redemption that Afrikania preaches should support political redemption and is seen as a necessary condition for true political independence. While there are obvious similarities between Afrikania's and Otobil's calls for African emancipation, Afrikania's strong link with the nation is very different from Pentecostalism's link to the nation. Pentecostalism challenges the state's authority over the nation and aims at Pentecostalising the nation. Afrikania's project is, at least in Damuah's time, to support the state in building a nation with a national traditional religion.

Damuah did not only concentrate on the Ghanaian nation. Just like Nkrumah actively devoted himself to the liberation of other African colonies after Ghana had reached independence, it was Damuah's ambition to create in Afrikania a spiritual basis for the liberation of the whole of Africa and for the Pan-African movement in general. Afrikania thus clearly has transnational aspirations and inspirational connections with transnational political movements, especially with Pan-Africanism and Black American emancipation.⁸ Afrikania still remains a pilgrim-site and a source of inspiration for visiting African-Americans and several of them have been ordained into Afrikania priesthood and established oversees 'branches.' Yet, after such foreign adherents - and sponsors! - have left for the US, they seem to be doing their own thing there and contact remains very limited. In practice no significant transnational network sustains Afrikania.

In 1992, when the documented history of Afrikania in the abovementioned studies stops, two events took place that had great implications for Afrikania's link to national politics and for the new directions Afrikania has taken over the last decade.

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The first is the turn to democracy in Ghanaian national politics and consequently the break of Afrikania's ties with the government. The second is the death of Afrikania's founder Damuah and his eventual succession by Osofo Kofi Ameve.

Break with the state

In 1992 democratic elections were held in Ghana, and although Rawlings remained in power, relations between the state and Afrikania became weaker, as the government from now on depended more on other powerful (religious) groups in society. In the competition for votes and popular support, it especially couldn't do without the increasingly popular and influential Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Rawlings gradually embraced Christianity and even Pentecostalism – according to Afrikania leaders under the influence of his wife Nana Konadu. As a result, Pentecostal influence and rhetoric started penetrating the government on several levels and pushed the state's cultural policy of Sankofa to the background. Moreover, Rawlings let go of the radical anti-Western rhetoric of his early years in power and adopted a more west-ern-oriented tactic in order to receive IMF and World Bank support. In the 2000 elections Rawlings' National Democratic Congress government lost power to the opposition, the liberal New Patriotic Party, resulting in a further loss of state support for traditional culture.

Where in the past Afrikania was, due to its close link with and partial dependency on Rawlings' Revolution, very uncritical and unconditionally supportive of the state and its leadership (Boogaard 1993:155), now it became increasingly critical of the state and its cultural policy, especially since the new NPP government came to power. Ameve accused the state of being made up of only born-again Christians and criticised the government, foreign embassies, and NGO's for corrupting traditional values and imposing foreign religious beliefs. For Afrikania, the ultimate proof of the hypocrisy of the state's cultural policy is the fact that the National Commission on Culture is made up of only Christians, with – and that is the summit of it – a charismatic pastor (Mensa Otobil) heading the religious section. Afrikania put pressure on the government to change the situation, but in vain. It also publicly urged the government to stop 'Christian indoctrination' of children in public schools and fiercely raised its voice after a government minister called for the abolishment of libation at public functions.⁹

Damuah's death

The second event that greatly changed Afrikania's public course was Damuah's death on 13 August 1992.¹⁰ After Damuah's funeral, Afrikania first seemed to disappear from the public stage as a result of an internal conflict and eventually a split over who should be the new leader. Afrikania's council of priests, responsible for choosing a successor, had difficulty finding a suitable candidate. Various potential candidates were considered, but either they were not willing to dedicate their life to the leadership of the mission (and thus give up their job), such as Dr. Kwakuvi Azazu, a lecturer at Cape Coast University, or they were not considered suitable. The well-known tradi-

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tionalist Dr. Kumordzi's commitment to the Hu-Yaweh cult, for example, was seen as too ethnically exclusive and potentially dangerous for the national character of Afrikania. Osofo Ameve was among the first Afrikania priests ordained by Damuah and had been Afrikania's deputy leader since the beginning, and thus would be the logical successor, but he only had an MA degree and the council wanted someone with a Ph.D. Ameve was thus rejected. When no suitable person could be found, however, a delegation was sent to Ameve's house to, as he told me, 'plead' with him to take up the leadership of the mission after all, which he 'humbly' accepted. In the meantime, however, Osofo Kwasi Quarm, who was also among the first nine priests ordained by Damuah, had claimed leadership already and called himself 'Head of Afrikania Mission.' When I spoke to him in his house in Madina, he claimed his right to succeed Damuah, based on the fact that he had buried him, or to be more precise, he had led the Afrikania delegation to Damuah's funeral, while Ameve had not even attended Damuah's funeral due to the funeral of his own brother.¹¹ So how could Ameve ever imagine succeeding Damuah, Quarm asked.¹² To solve the issue strategically, Ameve registered a separate religious body, named Afrikan Renaissance Mission (ARM), and claimed it to be 'reorganized Afrikania.'¹³ The conflict now evolved, however, over the question of which organisation was the genuine Afrikania Mission. One of the points of contention was the direction Damuah had envisioned for Afrikania. While Quarm and his supporters maintained that what Damuah had actually meant was an African version of Christianity, Ameve and his group said that Afrikania was from the beginning meant as a radically non-Christian religion.

Although this conflict was still being fought out in court and in the newspapers at the time of my stay, Osofo Komfo Kofi Ameve, a building contractor by profession, became widely recognised as Afrikania's legitimate leader and successfully asserted himself (although not uncontested) as the mouthpiece of traditional religion in Ghana.¹⁴ Ameve's Ewe identity has greatly influenced the ethnic composition of the movement, with Ewe members now being dominant (about 80%) and Ewe being the main local language spoken. Osofo Quarm has not managed to attract a large following, mainly operates on his own or with his few supporters, and largely disappeared from the public stage.¹⁵ The names Afrikania Mission and Afrikan Renaissance Mission are now used synonymously by Ameve's organisation, although Afrikania Mission remains better known publicly. The reappropriation of the name Afrikania also allowed Ameve to reinterpret its meaning. According to him, the name has nothing to do with the African continent, it is only coincidence that the names resemble. Instead, Afrikania is said to derive from the Twi phrase *efiri kanea*, meaning 'it comes from the light.' What Afrikania propagates then, is 'the religion of the light' and that is the 'authentic, traditional religion' of a particular locality. Hence, Afrikania is not limited to Africa alone. Everywhere in the world people should delve for their religious roots.

Afrikania's 'Second Servant,' Osofo Komfo Kofi Ameve

During the year that I spent with the Afrikania Mission in Accra, I came to know Osofo Ameve as a passionate and militant, yet amiable, modest, and pensive man. By then no-one expected that this would be the last year of his life. He suddenly died not

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long after I had left Accra. Ameve was a very different character than Damuah, whom Boogaard (1993:14) has described as an extremely exuberant, spontaneous, and impulsive person. He was a very different character also than Mensa Otabil, whose flamboyance, self-presentation, and charisma I sketched in chapter 2. Ameve certainly had charisma, but his charisma was of an entirely different kind than that of Otabil. He had an aura of wisdom that commanded respect and gave the impression of a man carrying the world's problems on his mind. He was a thinker and liked to talk with me about the problems of Africa, the inability and bad leadership of the government, the Christian dominance and suppression of traditional religion, and African selfhood. He seemed personally worried about his task and about the brainwashed minds of the people. I once found him in his office, his worries showing from his face, and he expressed his 'great doubts whether it will ever be alright with this country.' He said he grew 'very very sad' when he thought about Ghana.

Wisdom is a pain, ignorance is a blessing. When you know too much, you feel very sad, when you are ignorant you are happy. I do not see any improvement for this country. NDC, NPP, they all have the same mentality, they go round the world begging. There is something very wrong with the mentality of the leadership, or they are intentionally fooling the people for their own interest. Until we have a religion that brings people back to what they have and that makes them self-reliant, this country can never go forward. It's a very bad disease in Africa that everything from abroad is thought to be better and people turn away from their tradition. But what can you do? Even when you shout they will not hear your voice. When you tell them it is their religion that affects them, they will not believe. It will not be alright with this country until I die and reincarnate to lead this country.

This personal dedication to promoting African self-reliance and harsh criticism of the state in this respect clearly reminds us of Otabil. Although Ameve shared his commitment to African selfhood and consciousness with his predecessor Damuah, his attitude towards the government thus differed radically from that of Damuah, who was a friend of Rawlings and had even been a member of his PNDC, if only for a short while. On another occasion, Ameve told me:

I have learned that you have to do everything by yourself and not be dependent upon anybody. The government will not do anything for you. This road here [leading to the Afrikania building] is a public road, but it is so bad that it worries us. So I have brought workmen and cement and materials to repair it. If you wait for the government nothing will happen. I have nothing to do with the government. I only pay my taxes and obey the law to keep my conscience free, but that's it.

Ameve also cultivated an aura of mysteriousness. He hardly talked about himself, about his biography, only about what occupied his mind. I remember very well my frustration in the field when after three failed attempts to interview him about his life

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and many hours of waiting for him at the veranda of the Afrikania building, he finally called me in and asked me what I wanted to see him about. After switching on my recorder, I told him for the fourth time that I would like to talk about his life story, about his studies, his travels, and how he came to be the leader of Afrikania. All he said was

You know, we have a problem in Afrikania, a leader is not supposed to talk about his private life. The only thing I can say is I went to primary and secondary school and I couldn't continue because my father was poor. That's all. A leader is supposed to be humble and should not boast about his education and achievements or how he got to his present position. Talking about your life is too boastful, you are showing off. Moreover, there would be nothing mysterious about it anymore. We create myth around everything. There must be some little cloud about the mission.¹⁶

When one of the students of the Afrikania Priesthood School asked him to tell something about his biography, Ameve gave him a similar answer.

His aura of wisdom and mysteriousness and his intellectual orientation did not prevent him from mundane practices. When I came up the stairs of the Afrikania Mission house one morning and found Ameve quietly dusting the chairs on the veranda, I realized that his modesty was not a mere performance. When I visited him in his house for the first time, then, I was surprised at his wealth. At the time when Boogaard did her research on Afrikania, Ameve did not have a paid job, unsuccessfully tried to put up some business, and was financially supported by his three wives. When I met him ten years later, however, he had become a successful building contractor, running his own company Seba Constructions. His fortunes had enabled him to build a huge mansion in Haatso, an Accra suburb, where he lived with his wives and the four youngest of his ten children. I knew he had money; I had seen the nice car he used to come to the mission sometimes. Still I was struck by the two car gates and the spacious plot, where his watchman assigned me a place to park my car, the well designed multi-storied building, the fully equipped modern kitchen, where his elder wife welcomed me, and the leather couches and 40 inch flat screen television in the living room, where he sat watching CNN while awaiting my arrival. I saw very little that referred to what he himself would call 'African culture,' not even the 'African' paintings and wood sculptures that decorate many urban middle and upper class homes, and, as will be recalled, Otabil's offices. Indeed, the whole atmosphere of his home gave me the impression more of a well-to-do family somewhere in the United States, than of a traditionally oriented Ewe family in Accra. But despite his riches, huge mansion, and luxury cars, Ameve remained a simple man, averse to the kind of flamboyance and public ostentation characteristic of charismatic Christian leaders. Hence also his frequent complaints against the title 'His Holiness,' that 'they have conferred upon me.'¹⁷ This does not mean that he did not manage his public personality, on the contrary. His plain white outfit, his fly whisk, his dignified body movements, his public rhetoric, his title, which has been enshrined in the constitution that came into being under his leadership, and his general performance of spiritual leader-

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ship were all part of his public personality as the leader of the Afrikania Mission. And so was his performance of humility and reluctance to talk about himself.

Despite this reluctance I gathered bits and pieces of biographical information from his preaching, his Afrikania School lectures ('sometimes if you are teaching it is necessary to mention something as a reference, this is different from sitting for an interview about your life, when I am teaching my students, that is a different situation') and from Afrikania priests and members. Like Damuah, Ameve was an ex-Catholic. He left the Catholic Church in the 1970s, when he suddenly felt alienated and started searching for his 'African self.' He also dropped his former Christian names Sebastian Clement, an assertion of African pride and autonomy that we have also seen with Otabil. Until his death, however, Ameve remained a member of several Catholic lodges, among others the Knights of Marshall. This interest in mysticism fed his interest in the spiritual power of African traditional religion. But as it came through an interest in the esoteric part of Christianity, it was a specific interest in studying and understanding it rather than practising or dealing with it. Ameve's personal interest in spirituality combined with a general, public upsurge in spirituality connected to Pentecostalism's popularity and its emphasis on the spirit. As we shall see, during Ameve's leadership there was more room in Afrikania than before for spirituality, be it only in restricted contexts, and for public claims to spiritual power. On the other hand, however, Ameve was very skeptical about spiritual power. When he wanted to ordain me as an Afrikania priestess and I refused, telling him that I took Afrikania priesthood seriously and did not feel spiritually mature to fulfil such a position, he answered:

An Afrikania priest does not have any spiritual power, it is the belief of the people that you have something powerful, that makes God work through you, so that people perceive it like you are performing miracles. But in fact you have nothing. I have also nothing. I have had no spiritual training or anything, but still people believe I have something. Miracles do not exist, nobody has the power to perform miracles. Damuah did not believe in God. It is people's belief in you that gives you the power, it is the group spirit that comes from people's belief. When I appear with my flywhisk in my hand, people believe that it has a power, but I know that it is just a flywhisk I bought in the market.¹⁸

Interestingly, Ameve's analysis that people's belief that you have 'something powerful' makes them perceive that you perform miracles reminds us of Weber's interpretation of charisma as people's perception of special gifts of a leader (chapter 2). Like Weber in his definition of charisma, Ameve thus located spiritual power not so much in the person of the spiritual leader, but in the relationship between leader and followers. Spiritual power then becomes closely linked to 'impression management.' Ameve's interest in spiritual power, then, was clearly also part of his public personality as Afrikania leader, partly embodied by his appearance, partly by his rhetoric.

Ameve was born around 1950 in Klikor, a village in the Volta Region known for the strength and public presence of several traditional shrines. He spent his early youth with his grandfather, a powerful shrine priest, but his father was a staunch Catholic. He went to a Catholic school and later lived in the mission house with white mission-

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aries. When he was fifteen, he went to stay with his father. In his late youth, Ameve was a member of the Ghana Young Pioneers, the youth wing of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party. The nationalist, patriotic orientation of this movement still echoes in Ameve's rhetoric.¹⁹ For a long time Ameve worked as a (head) teacher in Ho (Volta Region) and was an active member

of the Teachers Association. Both organizations brought him many semi-political contacts. When he worked at the education office in Ho, he was rewarded a scholarship to go and study in Europe and went to Brussels. As said, however, he did not talk about his travels or his intellectual achievements or failures. Around 1980, he went to study in Cairo for some time. It was in Egypt, that Ameve became particularly interested in the problems of Africa, of the Black man, and in Black Egyptian history and civilisation and its links with Black Africa. 'It was there at the pyramids and other things that I realized that our history has to be rewritten. When I came back I discovered that Damuah was doing this and I joined him.' Ameve was among the first nine Afrikania priests ordained by him in 1982 and soon became the deputy leader. When he finally became the leader after Damuah's death, his fortunes enabled him to finance many of Afrikania's projects. Next to members' monthly dues and weekly donations, (foreign) visitors' donations, occasional fund raising among members, and sales of publications, especially the *Divine Acts* (fig. 5.9), Ameve's personal capital became one of Afrikania's major sources of money. So much so that when he suddenly passed away in June 2003, the financial basis of the mission became very insecure.

Ameve's death

On 5th June 2003, three months after I had returned to Amsterdam from Accra, I received an email from Ameve's son Senyo:

Adwoa sorry to tell you this, Osofo fell sick seriously and gave up his ghost (died) on Tuesday June 3rd, I will keep you informed as to when the burial will take place. Bye

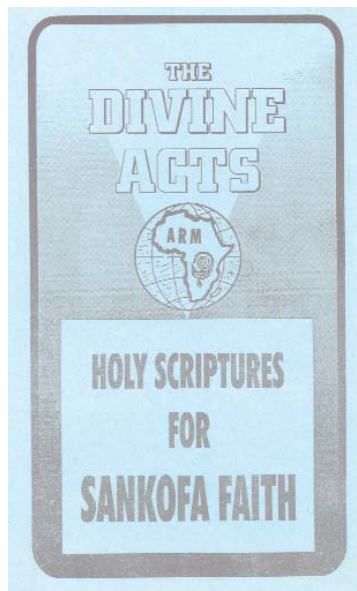


Fig. 5.9 Front cover of the *Divine Acts*. Holy Scriptures for the Sankofa Faith.

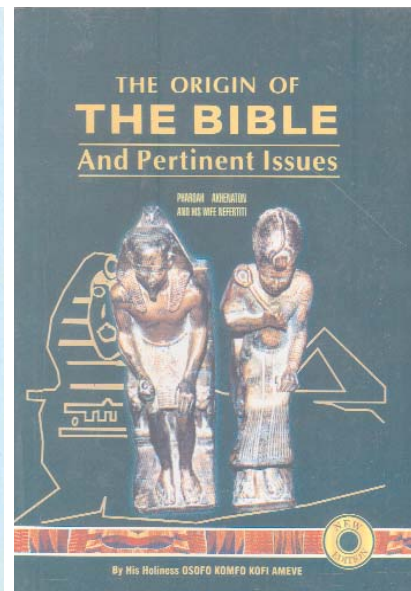


Fig. 5.10 Front cover of *The Origin of the Bible* (Ameve 2002).

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He needed no more words to inform me that his father had suddenly and unexpectedly passed away two days before after a very short illness. The news came as a shock to me. Suddenly my thoughts about this ever-active, passionate, and dedicated person were memories. Also, I immediately realized that this was, again, going to change Afrikaania's course, dependent as the movement had become, especially for its public presence, on Ameve's vision and money. Unfortunately, I could not go back to Accra for his funeral on the 25th and 26th of July, but I got information from Afrikanians, his successor Osofo Atsu Kove, and the funeral videos and brochure. Atsu Kove told me that Ameve's funeral was organised and paid for by Afrikaania, not by Ameve's family. Initially, the family wanted to do everything, but Afrikaania insisted that 'the man is our father, he did a great work for us, for the whole Africa. So if he dies and we cannot bury him and have to leave him on the family it is a big disgrace.' The family agreed and Afrikaania organised everything. According to their father's wish and to customary practice, Ameve's children bought the coffin. The rest, refreshments, organisation of everything, the media report, announcements, totalling around 52 million cedis (over 6,000 US dollars), was paid for by Afrikaania members.

You know, Afrikaania, money matter is our problem, but wonderfully our people help a lot, they raised money, before we remember we raise enough money to organise his funeral. If you come you will like it. TV Africa cover it, TV Africa show it more than one week, every evening. TV3 also show it, only GTV didn't come. GTV we have problem with them, anytime we call them, they

Fig. 5.11 Funeral brochure Osofo Komfo Kofi Ameve, front and back.



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don't come. Even after the funeral, my installation, we invited them, they refused. TV3 came and TV Africa, they came.²⁰

The funeral was held at the empty space in front of Ameve's house at Haatso, which was cleared with a bulldozer. Despite the traditional practice of burying people in their hometown, Ameve was buried at Osu Cemetery in Accra. Atsu Kove explained:

Because the man is so great. If we should be dragging his body here and there it will create some confusion. He was also a national figure. Normally, people like this, we shouldn't have been burying them. If we were to have money, we have to embalm them.

Ameve had left a note concerning his own funeral that was copied on the first page of the funeral brochure (fig. 5.11) and that read:

When I am dead read the FF at my funeral. 17 – 6 – 1996. No one should read or say anything about me. Whatever anyone thinks I have done or achieved in my life is done by God through me. If I have ever done any good to anyone, that person must also try to do something good for someone, if I have offended anyone in the course of my life I plead that the person should forgive me. This is my command and it should be respected.
Kofi Ameve, 17/6/96.

In an email Osofo Komla Matrevi, an Afrikania priest in Togo, told me that indeed 'as the Holiness had written it, nobody read or said nothing about him at his funeral.' Contrary to Ameve's command, however, the funeral programme as printed in the funeral brochure announces the 'reading of tributes accompanied with playing of dirges with flutes and interspersed with traditional music.' More than half of the brochure's 48 pages are dedicated to tributes by various persons and groups. The format of the brochure is exactly like those of Christian burials (De Witte 2001). The front cover shows a picture of Ameve in his white gown with his names, including his Christian names, and the text 'burial, memorial and thanksgiving service.' What differs is the 'translation' of the dates of birth and death into two *afa* signs.²¹ The back cover carries a verse from the *Divine Acts* and a note of 'appreciation' from the 'Afrikania Mission and the Entire Families' ending with the phrase 'May the good Lord richly and bountifully bless you all.'

Afrikania's 'Third Servant,' Osofo Komfo Atsu Kove

When I returned to Accra in March 2005, Atsu Kove (fig. 5.13) had been chosen as Ameve's successor by the council of priests. I knew him from my fieldwork period as an enthusiastic, cheerful, dedicated priest of the headquarters branch. As he is a very good and motivating speaker, he often preached during Sunday service. He was a French teacher for 24 years, but quit his job to dedicate himself to the leadership of the Afrikania Mission. Unlike Afrikania's first two leaders Atsu Kove is not an ex-Christian

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Fig. 5.12 Details of memorial cloth depicting the Afrikania Mission's 'Great Ancestors' Osofo Komfo Damuah and Osofo Komfo Kofi Ameve.

who 'converted' to ATR out of intellectual conviction.²² He was born in a traditional religious family in Togo, 44 years ago, and has never gone to any church before. He went to school in Togo, where the Christian hegemony is much less strong than in the Ghanaian school system. He is proud of his traditional religious background.

Even around the age of nine, ten, I always challenge Christians. Since my childhood I have never gone to any church before, my grandmother is a divine priestess. In Togo. So normally when they are drumming traditional drums like that I love it. For me I like those things. When it comes to juju matters I like it. Even sometimes at a tender age around eleven I build shrines, I go to the bush to build a shrine myself to play there, I made icons and even steal people's fowl to kill on it. And drum in the bush. Sometimes I even had people around who will claim that they are possessed. Children, as a play. So I have never gone to church before, though my village is full of churches and my friends were going to Roman, to learn catechism. They were trying to drag me, but I told them, you, you are joking. God is everywhere. God of Israel cannot come and save you in Africa. No pastor baptised me before. Because I hate them since my childhood.²³

When he came to Ghana at the age of sixteen to study French and English at the Ghana Institute of Languages, he did not lose his traditionalist interest and

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remained fiercely anti-Christian and that is how he came into contact with Afrikania mission.

Because of the way I have been challenging the Christians, someone said do you go to Afrikania? I said what is Afrikania? He said it is a church who behave like you. I said are you sure there is a church like that? Do they use bible? He say no. He say that every Tuesday they come to wireless. So on Tuesday I open the radio, aao, I love it. They pour libation, I say yes, this is my church. That happen in 1982, as soon as Damuah established the church. That time I was around eighteen years. Very young. So Sunday quickly I went to Arts Centre and met Komfo Damuah. [...] That day he gave me a book called *The Ancient Wisdom* and a picture. Damuah himself handed those things over to me like this. I knelt down before him and thank him, that I am pleased to meet him. Not knowing that maybe what happen that day is symbolic. Spiritually it mean that he has handed something over to me that one day I shall continue with his work. Today today I have that picture and his book with me.

When I asked him why he was chosen to succeed Ameve, he did not mind 'boasting' about his achievements and pointed to the role he played in Afrikania as an active campaigner, establishing branches in the Volta Region and in Togo.²⁴

I remember I had a car, Peugeot 104, I bought speakers myself, address system, and put it on the car, roaming about, campaigning like an evangelist. So that made me popular. So the name they know me around those areas is *Sankôfa*. Because of our slogan. *Sankôfa, biribi wò hò!* [go back to take it, there is something there!] I shouted it through the loudspeakers. With my cassettes I would be playing songs, traditional songs. And people would challenge me, but I stop the car and preach to them. Even Accra here, most of the shrines, I brought them to Afrikania. To the point that they have realised that this boy can do the work. I do it selflessly, I don't collect money from anybody. I use my own money. Afrikania doesn't have money, the work belongs to all of us, so I did that selflessly. I soon as I get my salary at the end of the month, I just go round start making the noise of Afrikania.

Unlike Ameve, Atsu Kove is not a rich man, but he is able to 'feed himself' of a French school book that he wrote and that is now widely used in Ghanaian schools. Apart from that, he believes that 'it is the ancestors who have chosen me to do this work, how I shall survive, they know. They will provide.' Although Atsu Kove has been able to use his own money to campaign for Afrikania, it is clear that he has no private resources at his disposal to invest in Afrikania and its public representation in particular, as Ameve did. The future of the movement will thus remain uncertain. The fact that he is not an ex-Christian, like his two predecessors, may make a big difference for Afrikania, especially for the relationship with traditional shrines, which will be discussed in the next chapter. To what extent, however, remains to be seen.

Afrikan Traditional Religion in a Christian format

In order to create an alternative to and compete with Christianity, Afrikania has adopted a Christian religious format, despite its explicit refusal of all Christian influence. From Afrikania's foundation up till now, Christianity has provided the format for the new religion in several ways. First, its project of reforming traditional religion implied a Christian concept of religion; secondly, its rewritten history of Africa in the end appropriates and identifies with key elements of Christianity; and thirdly, Afrikania's form of Sunday worship and organisational structure are modelled on the Catholic church. At present, charismatic Pentecostalism, being the dominant and most publicly present religion, has become the template for what 'religion' is and should look like and hence also for Afrikania.

Reforming Afrikan Traditional Religion

Afrikania's 'origin myth,' as it circulates among members and is taught to prospective priests, has it that the mission was 'born' on a global religious platform, the World Religions Conference. It is told that Damuah, who had then been a Catholic priest for 25 years and was about to be ordained a bishop, was sent as the Ghanaian representative. At the Conference he noticed that all parts of the world had representatives for their own religion: Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, but there was not a single representative for African religion. He thus got the idea to form the Afrikania Mission to represent Afrikan Traditional Religion as a world religion in itself. Born in a global context of world religions as different, but structurally comparable varieties of 'religion,' it may thus not be surprising that the reformulation of ATR implied the adoption of a universalised, yet originally Christian concept of religion as belief. To create a 'systematic and coherent doctrine for Ghanaians and Africans in the diaspora,' Afrikania has picked elements from traditional religious belief, such as belief in multiple gods and spirits, in the power of ancestors, and in possession, and reformed and brought these together in an intellectualist, Christian-modelled doctrine. This includes Holy Scriptures, the *Divine Acts* (Ameve n.d.; fig. 5.9), prophets, a list of commandments, and a standardised liturgy, prayers, and slogans (see appendix IV). Significantly, the *Divine Acts* were written by Ameve in a few months after a radio station in Kumasi wanted to interview him on air, but only on the condition that the movement has a 'sacred book' like the bible. Termed 'Holy Scriptures' or 'our bible,' the book is more of a manifesto. Other terminology used in Afrikania also indicates this kind of borrowing from a Christian idea of what religion entails: church, liturgy, preaching, communion, offertory, evangelisation. Afrikania also takes up a Protestant-like concept of the person as a makable and controllable self and is committed to 'self-reliance, self-determination and self-development.' At the same time 'Afrikania believes in the phenomenon of possession,' which is quite the opposite of self-determination. So while Afrikania consciously posits itself as non-Christian and calls for a 'revolution in the meaning of Religion,' it exactly subscribes to a universalist, modern definition of religion that has its roots in Protestantism (Asad 1993) by recasting traditional religion in terms of belief, teaching, and symbols

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(cf. Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). One of the instructions Ameve gave to prospective Afrikania priests, then, was to 'remind people all the time what we believe in,' while local religious traditions are rather organised around practices of communicating with and influencing the spiritual world. Here, then, we can discern the legacy of the long intellectual tradition of conceptualising ATR in Christian terms.

Interestingly, not only is Afrikania's assertion of culture and tradition similar to early anthropology's constructions, the movement's leaders also used such anthropological studies of *the* culture of a people, in which Christianity was usually conspicuously absent, as authoritative sources on 'Afrikan culture.' During Damuah's time, for example, the studies of Asante culture by the British colonial anthropologist R.S. Rattray (especially *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 1927) were among the favourite books read from during Afrikania services (Gyanfosu 1995).²⁵ Despite Afrikania leaders' criticism of 'foreign scholars' misrepresentations of the Religion of Afrika,' then, Africanist academic literature also provided them, and still does, with a means to substantiate their claims to 'Afrikan culture.'



Fig. 5.13 The 'third servant of the Afrikania Mission,' Osofo Komfo Atsu Kove.

Rewriting the history of civilisation

Damuah's revolutionary background provided the intellectual, political, nationalist orientation and the rhetorical styles. Afrikania shared the anti-Western and anti-Christian ideology of the Revolution and its Africanist discourse included a radical rewriting of the history of civilisation, inspired by Black emancipatory literature (e.g. James 1992[1954]; Williams 1992[1971]). This version of history teaches that civilisation was born and developed in ancient Egypt, which was, contrary to what the colonialists have made Africans to believe, inhabited and ruled by blacks. This ancient black civilisation forms the basis of all African culture and religions, was stolen by foreigners that came to Egypt at the height of its civilisation and so became the basis also for Christianity and for the Greek and Roman cultures on which Western civilisation is founded. When the Romans invaded Egypt, plundered the libraries and killed the priests, the blacks moved away, spread across the continent in small groups and settled in West-Africa and other parts. In Afrikania's doctrine, then, the Egyptian Sun

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God Ra is 'our supreme Creator,' the Egyptian Book of Life and Death is appropriated as the written Revelations on which African religion is built and King Mena of Ethiopia, King Akhnaton of Egypt and his wife Queen Nfertiti, feature together with the famous Asante priest Akomfo Anokye, King Shaka Zulu, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. DuBois, and Kwame Nkrumah as its prophets. In his book *The Origin of the Bible* (2002) (fig. 5.10) Ameve also traces the concept of monotheism, the bible, the ten commandments and other central elements of Christianity to black African religion. By claiming ancestry to black ancient Egypt and its cultural products, Afrikania engages in a struggle with the whites about the symbols of civilisation, aimed at appropriating the symbols the whites have used to legitimise their superior position vis-à-vis Africans. In creating an ideological instrument to free Africans of their inferiority complex, however, Afrikania invents an Africa that resembles the West more than it celebrates its own specific cultural characteristics (cf. Schirripa 2000) and makes claims to Christianity as deriving from an African origin rather than to West-African religious traditions. Rather than practically drawing upon and taking pride in the practices of traditional religious practitioners in Ghana, Afrikania identifies with the achievements of the 'high civilizations' of ancient Egypt and Greece.

This recourse to ancient Egyptian religion and civilisation is also an attempt to solve the problem of the ethnic and territorial specificity of local religious traditions. As the various local deities and their cults are often incompatible and even competing with each other, Afrikania had to look for a common, universal object of worship elsewhere. This was found in the supposed common religious source of all these cults, ancient Egypt. Damuah, influenced by the popularity of ancient Egyptian spirituality among American Pan-Africanists, hence appropriated the Sun God Amen-Ra or Ra as the 'supreme Creator and universal almighty God.' During Sunday service this divine creator was thus endlessly addressed with the phrase 'Amen-Ra! – Amen!' and called upon as 'Father' (just like the Christian God) in prayers and formulas. When I talked about Ra with some Afrikanians, however, it appeared that Ra had very little personal significance for them. In contrast to various local deities and spirits, Ra was generally not felt to have any impact on one's life.

Finding a common form of worship

Let us return to the Sunday service described at the beginning of this chapter. Apart from the 'protestantisation' of ATR described above, Afrikania has also appropriated Christianity more practically as a format for religious worship. Damuah's Catholic background provided the practice of and format for Afrikania's newly invented Sunday worship (fig. 5.7). All ingredients, the symbols, the texts, the rituals, the songs, the sequence of events, are carefully selected or created and arranged in a way that follows the structure of a Catholic mass and has very little to do with what goes on in rural (and urban) shrines. When I discussed this with Ameve, his response was that if you want to bring together all traditional religions, which include so many different cults that all have their own practices and ways of worship, you have to 'find a form where everybody can feel at home.' Let me discuss three worship practices that form part of this common form of the Sunday service: prayer, communion, and music.

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Afrikanians address Ra and the deities and ancestral spirits that are his intermediaries both through Christian-like prayers, such as those quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and through libation prayer. Here again, the problem of uniformity emerges. The pouring of libation is generally conceived as a form of prayer common to all traditional religions. The liquid used, however, differs, although alcohol is most common. Afrikania has chosen to pour libation with water, as Ameve explained in an Afrikania Priesthood School lecture on Afrikania liturgy:

We don't use alcohol for libation, because all shrines use different things: palm kernel oil, alcohol, soft drink, cola nut. But all shrines use water, so we use water. We have to look for the things that unite them.

When one of the student priests objected that water is not as powerful as alcohol, Ameve answered that if you want to unite, you necessarily have to compromise. A similar search for the things that unite all shrines informed Afrikania's practice of sprinkling and eating 'ancestral food,' also called 'communion.' Osofo Yaw Osono taught in the school:

When we enter a new moon, we sprinkle ancestral sacred food. In Akan this is *akwasidae*, but in Accra we do it on the first Sunday of the month for convenience and uniformity. You can use *eto* [an Akan sacred food], *kpekple* [a Ga sacred food], but in future all communion should come from one source, here, like all Catholic communion comes from the Vatican. *Eto* is white yam and red oil, like the bread and wine in the Catholic church. What we prepare and use here is *edza*, made of corn and honey and baked to be like biscuit. Then it is cut into pieces for sprinkling. While sprinkling you say good things you want to happen in the lives of the people, calling the divinities, *abosom*. You are ringing the bell whilst you go and the people sing a solemn song. Then you share what is left among the people.

Immediately one of the students raised the issue that 'certain foods may be taboo to certain divinities; corn, millet, cola nut, goat meat. How do we deal with this?' Another teacher, Osofo Kwakuvi Azazu, then responded that

A food taboo is no problem when you take it in a congregation and you don't know it. The moment you know you are taking it, the taboo will affect you. So we shouldn't worry about this as long as we don't tell the person.

The questioner did not seem satisfied with this answer, but said nothing. In creating a common form of worship out of ancient Egyptian gods and prophets, local traditional practices and Christian forms, then, Afrikania tries to find a balance between uniformity and neutrality on the one hand and cultural significance on the other.

But there is more to it than finding a common form, as Ameve explained when I expressed my surprise at the Christian worship and prayer formats.

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Some people say it is modelled after Christianity. But that seems to be what people want. That they can also say 'we are going to that and that church.' Coming together every Sunday for the purpose of worship and mutual inspiration is crucial. If you don't form the habit of coming together every Sunday, your people will be diverted into various churches, because the group spirit and the drumming attracts.²⁶

Being religious in present-day Ghana has come to mean dressing up and going to church on Sundays to sing and dance together and listen to preaching, usually visible and especially audible for the whole neighbourhood. Traditionalists, even if consciously not choosing for a Christian church, also want a church to go to and be seen in order to be recognised as belonging to a religion. Clearly, Afrikania has to compete with the Christian churches in providing Sunday entertainment, especially music and dance. Drumming fills a large part of the service and brings priests and ordinary members, men and women, and children together in dancing. As most of the drummers are Ewe, they most often play Ewe entertainment rhythms, such as *agbadza* or *borborbor*. Various types of song are performed throughout the service, including traditional Ewe, Akan, or Ga songs, warrior songs, patriotic songs, such as the 'Afrikan Anthem' *Yen ara y'asaase ni* (This is our own land) composed by musician and nationalist Dr. Ephraim Amu, or specific Afrikania songs. A public address system amplifies both music and preaching. Unnecessary for reaching the handful of people attending a service, it is meant mainly for establishing a public presence in Sunday's battle field of religious sound and for raising the curiosity of the people in the neighbourhood.²⁷ This raises the question of whom Afrikania actually addresses. This issue of publics and members will be addressed in the next chapter. As will be worked out there, Afrikania addresses different audiences at the same time, which makes its politics of representation highly complicated.

Growing public presence and getting established

Under Ameve's leadership, Afrikania has embarked on a process of growing public presence and getting established as a religious organisation. Ameve narrated:

Damuah was the pioneer. It is only now that Afrikania is getting established. It is a pity that Pauline [Boogaard] came too early. There were many difficulties in the past. We had government support, both morally and in the form of a loudspeaker system, vehicles and other equipment, from Rawlings' revolution, but no popular support. People thought it was only revolutionary. We have been doing our thing quietly, so not many people knew us. Only recently we came out. In 1997 we organised a big convention at the Independence Square that shocked the world. Thousands of traditionalists came from all over the country. We had to struggle, because those Christians tried to block the road and prevent us from reaching the square. We had to insist that this is a public place, but in the end we got there. Then we were quiet again and now we are

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again coming out. But now we are not doing propaganda, but establishing a real training programme.²⁸

This mass gathering at the place of the nation par excellence was clearly an answer to Pentecostal attempts at claiming the nation, a sign to the Christian majority that traditionalists are alive, kicking and many. Two other conventions followed in 1999 and in 2000. In addition, Afrikania established its public presence by celebrating its 20th anniversary with two days of spectacular public ceremonies covered by radio, television, and the press, building a huge, new headquarters (the opening of which was part of the 20th anniversary celebrations), founding the 'Afrikania Priesthood Training School,' publicly ordaining sixty newly trained priests and priestesses (also as part of the celebrations), and adopting an 'evangelisation' programme of mobilising traditionalists and establishing branches throughout the country and abroad. Due to the loss of government backing, competition with other religious groups has grown. Afrikania increasingly manifests itself in the public sphere and has during Ameve's time started to establish a strong public presence on its own.

The Afrikania Mission Headquarters

In March 2002 Afrikania's new headquarters in Sakaman, Accra, were officially opened (fig. 5.14). The mission used to be somehow hidden away, renting a drinking spot at the Arts Centre for their Sunday services. Now it is clearly claiming public presence with a huge, yellow painted four storey building with 'Afrikania Mission' written on top of it in big capitals. Visible from very far away, the new building is a sign of finally being established, an important step in the struggle for public recognition.

Ameve proudly showed me around the tiled entrance hall and broad staircases, the numerous spacious rooms, his own lavish air-conditioned office, the two-room apartment for his overnight stays, the airy veranda overlooking the neighbourhood, and the brand new toilets and showers. I was surprised at the 'secularity' of the building, as to me it had nothing of a religious building. The worship service in the entrance hall of an office-like building seemed out of place. Still smelling of fresh cement and paint, the building was spectacularly opened with a public durbar and worship service.²⁹ Many members wore the special anniversary cloth with the mission's logo that had just been printed and was 'outdoored' that day. A new large and colourful signboard was put by the roadside for the occasion. The libation scene painted on the signboard is a clear sign to the general public that here traditional religion is practiced.³⁰ The entrance hall and the altar outside had been decorated with balloons and ribbons. The press, radio journalists, photographers, and a Ghana Television crew were present to cover the proceedings, including the spectacular arrival of a shrine priest of national fame, Nana Drobo II of the Kwaku Firi shrine in Brong Ahafo,³¹ and his retinue, music and dance by youth groups, various speeches, and cutting the tape tied across the entrance. The speeches and presence of dignitaries and the tape cutting were all part of the common format of public opening ceremonies, performed daily by state officials and publicised in the state media. The decorations also conformed to the popular aesthetic styles characteristic of such festivities.

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What this format hid were the spiritual aspects of the building. While at first sight Afrikania's headquarters seem like an ordinary office building, it also has spaces where spirits are given a dwelling place, spaces that do not form part of the public scripts of an opening ceremony or a Sunday service. Right at the gate of the premises, for example, is a small, rectangular pit in the concrete pavement, covered with a wooden lid. It is so inconspicuous that I had never seen it until two priests, Torgbe Kortor and Osofo Fiakpo, wanted to inform Legba, the divinity staying there, about the reasons why I was asking so many questions and took me there to pour libation and offer a few cedis. They explained to me that Legba is like a police man, overseeing and protecting the whole mission.³² He is involved in, and thus has to be informed about, anything going on at the premises. He also asks for food, sometimes eggs, sometimes a cock, a ram, or another male animal. Before the 20th anniversary celebrations, a secret ceremony was done for Legba and he was given a cock, 'because,' Osofo Fiakpo explained, 'here is like a shrine, so there must be spiritual police.' 'So do you call this place a shrine too?' I asked. Both agreed that 'this is not a shrine.' 'It is a church,' Torgbe Kortor said, 'but because we are doing tradition, this man controls what we do.'

Eliciting more about the difference between 'church' and 'shrine,' I then asked about the fenced, empty sand pit at the back of the building, also termed 'shrine' and used for pouring libation during private spiritual performances (not during Sunday services or public events, when libation is poured on the concrete floor in front of the building).

MDW: What about the little place in the back, where the sand is?

TK: Where the sand is, that place is known as the shrines. They are governing the whole mission; that is where they are. But in actual fact they are in a room. But because this is a mission, there is nothing like that. We designed a place for them, so that when we want to mention our great-grandfathers' name or anything, or anybody comes for prayers, we go there to pray and mention their name. And they will listen to you there.

MDW: So that place is like a substitute for what happens in a proper shrine?

TK: Correct.

MDW: But why can't you make a room like that here? There are so many rooms in this building.

TK: We should have, but... I don't know... we may do it in some time to come.

OF: We are several cults, so some people may say that 'if this cult is here, I am not coming.' So we do it general. Neutral. So that anybody can come here.

As with finding a common form of worship, with such practices of sacralising space the aim of 'neutrality' threatens to preclude spiritual substance. In traditional religion divinities are far from neutral; they are ethnically and territorially specific and compete with each other for power. Moreover, they are often located in physical objects. Bringing divinities to a new place in the form of such spiritual objects, as can be done to establish a new shrine, would in Afrikania's case undermine its very objective of uniting all traditional cults. What is left are empty pits and the claim that divinities dwell therein.

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A new sacred space, created by Osofo Atsu Kove after Ameve's death, is the 'stool room' on the top floor of the building. Atsu Kove recounted:³³

First there was no stool house, but now there is. A miracle happened here. We the Afrikania Mission, we are just handling the academic side, the intellectual side of the whole thing, to promote our tradition and culture. So we were not worrying ourselves about stool houses and those kind of things. But the ancestors saw that no, what we are doing is very big. The whole thing must sit. So when they chose me to be the leader and we were thinking about the day [of installation], on February 18th [2004] something happened here. Since I told you I will tell you every secret, I will tell you right now. I was here when somebody was possessed, we don't know the person, a young man, about 25, 30, possessed, dressed in traditional beads, *kente*, this thing. And he came here with a stool. The person was possessed and said that Okomfo Anokye, Kofi Ameve and Osofo Damuah say he should bring the stool to us. He went to sit under the picture of Okomfo Anokye, shouting '*Papa, maba, papa, maba, maba. Enne mede w'akonnua naba, w'akonnua aba fie*' [Father, I have come. Today I have brought your stool. Your stool has come home]. So that stool, according to divination, is the stool which has come for Afrikania to grow. So since then, we have a stool house for this place.

It is there that 'the spirit of Afrikania' is said to reside and the spirits of Afrikania's deceased leaders will get their own stools in the future. The room is not accessible to anyone except Atsu Kove and a few senior priests and priestesses. They use the room for prayers, libation, and rituals. 'That is our contact point now,' Atsu Kove told me, 'the spiritual room of Afrikania Mission. That is our power, everything. So many miracles are taking place here.' While Afrikania's new building is clearly a public symbol of being an established religion, a claim to public presence, it also has spaces that are certainly not meant for the eye of the general public. It is there that spiritual powers are given a place through practices of sacralising its otherwise 'secular,' office-like premises.

Of a different nature, but equally kept hidden from public ceremonies and rhetoric, was the fact that the building was not owned by Afrikania, but by Ameve's construction company. One afternoon I sat on the balcony chatting with Osofo Ameve and Osofo Enim, when Ameve started complaining about Osofo Frimpong, a now dismissed Afrikania priest. He had accused Ameve in the media of advertising the Afrikania building for private purposes. But Ameve turned it around:

Afrikania did not build this building. I built it and I gave the ground floor to Afrikania. People even come and want to hire it, but I gave it to Afrikania. I put Afrikania's name on the building as an advertisement on the wall. You can lease pieces of wall and put your advert there. I put the name there for free, I bought the paint myself, as an advertisement, to sell the mission.³⁴

It turned out that the building was Ameve's private property. His construction company, SEBA Constructions Ltd., was also located in the building. Actually the first floor



Fig. 5.14 Scenes from the inauguration of the Afrikania Mission Headquarters (March 2002).

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was for the company, and the ground floor for Afrikania. Awaiting the completion of the offices downstairs, Afrikania's office was also on the first floor. That afternoon I also discovered that one of Ameve's secretaries, Naki, was actually not a secretary for Afrikania, but for SEBA Constructions. Only Mama, a young queenmother from Klikor, Ameve's hometown, worked for Afrikania, officially that is. In practice, this division was not so clear, as Naki also carried out many administrative tasks for Afrikania. She was not an Afrikania member, however. Interestingly, she went to the Church of Pentecost. Yet, she liked what Afrikania does. She told me about her traditional Krobo home – 'we have a shrine in the house and all that' – and showed me the *dipo* marks on her hands.³⁵

Tradition is very important. So anything Afrikania does, I am here with them and I help them. Except on Sundays, then I go to my own church. I also tell the people in my church that it is very important to have and respect tradition. And they accept it.³⁶

While Afrikania thus merely made use of the facilities the office building offered, including an extra secretary, the grand opening rather celebrated Afrikania's achievement in putting up such a building.

The controversy over the building, however, already partly played out in the press during Ameve's lifetime, developed into a major conflict after his death, when his children claimed the building, saying that it was their father's private property. According to Atsu Kove, the land was bought by a special Afrikania committee with money raised among the priests and members. The building, however, was put up by Ameve himself, without involving Afrikanians. That is why, Atsu Kove said, 'the thing is no more in the form of a church building.' But 'no-one didn't really mind much, because we know he is dedicated.' After the inauguration of the building, however, Ameve called a meeting of priests and elders, where he told them that the building is not for Afrikania. This shocked the elders and 'the meeting did not come to a good end.' Five months later Ameve died. When Atsu Kove told me this, I realised that I had been present at the time of this inauspicious meeting. Apparently the issue had been too sensitive to tell me about it at the time. When I came back two years later, the conflict had generated a physical struggle between Ameve's children and Afrikanians. When the children put a gate at the entrance and heightened the fence wall, Afrikania members came to demolish it and sack the workers. They reported the incident to the police and tied red strips of cloth to the building as a sign of war. As of July 2007, the case is still pending in court and thus the future remains highly uncertain.³⁷ Atsu Kove expects, however, 'that God and the ancestors are going to perform a miracle.'³⁸ The whole case also brought Ameve in posthumous disgrace with many Afrikanians. Atsu Kove:

The members are aggrieved. Even some of them threatened that if it come to critical point they will never mention his name in libation again. Because he has defrauded them. He has fooled us. He shouldn't behave like that. Very unfortunate. ... He did good work, actually during his era Afrikania grew,

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Afrikania developed a lot, especially the *trokosi* war that he fought made Afrikania very popular.³⁹ But then, as far as this building matter is concerned, he didn't try at all. The members are aggrieved, including me.

Still, Ameve's portrait figures with that of Damuah at an Afrikania memorial cloth celebrating 'the great ancestors' printed after his death (fig. 5.12). Clearly, there is an uncomfortable tension between the popular formats of representing (religious) authority, to which this type of memorial cloth certainly belongs, and Afrikania's internal struggles and disillusionments that are rather kept outside public representations.

The Afrikania Priesthood Training School

Not only the building itself, but also the offices and the new Afrikania Priesthood Training School it houses are significant with respect to public presence. Like any self-respecting church, the Afrikania Mission now also has its 'school of ministry.' So far, the school offers a two-week intensive introductory course in Afrikan Traditional Religion for prospective Afrikania priests and priestesses, but Ameve dreamt of developing the training programme up to Ph.D. level. After the course, which covers ATR 'in general,' history, ideology and teachings of Afrikania, and liturgy and worship practice, the participants are honoured with a public 'graduation ceremony' and encouraged to go out and establish a branch. The course is open to anybody, but attracts mainly traditionalists from the Volta Region, where Ameve hails from. They pay a moderate fee of 50,000 cedis (\$ 3.75), which covers teaching and accommodation in the Afrikania building.

In 2001, I participated in the introduction course, together with twelve prospective Afrikania priests, eight men and four women. Apart from one Afrikania member from Kumasi and one from Lomé (Togo), they were all from the Volta Region. Most of them were already active in one of the Afrikania branches there, some already acting as a priest. One of the rooms on the first floor of the Afrikania building was equipped as a class room, with thirty new wooden chairs with side tables and one teacher's desk arranged in a formal class room setting. This setting informed the mode of class teaching, which consisted of lectures in both English and Ewe. The lectures, many of them given by Ameve and some by other Afrikania priests, dealt with the history of the relationship between Africa and Europe: slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism; the present Christian suppression of ATR; the 'content' of ATR: 'deities' and 'spirits,' sacrifice, ancestors, creation; and the history and ideology of Afrikania. In general the students listened to all of this rather passively. Only a few of them took notes. Not all of the students were able to read and write well. Most of them just listened and some asked a question afterwards.

Sometimes a group discussion evolved, such as when Alorlezuma, a young Ewe woman from an *afa* family, voiced her complaints about the course. After yet another lecture on the goodness and the power of *abosom* and *vodu* and the evil done by Christianity, Alorlezuma suddenly expressed that she did not know what she was here for. Abiba, who had come with her and depended on her because she is illiterate,

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then complained that Alorlezuma's lack of confidence also affected her and asked Osofo Ameve to talk to her sister. Alorlezuma explained that she wanted to leave traditional religion and go to church and be baptised. She had seen in her own house how traditional religion was used to exploit people. The divinities in her house belonged to her grandparents and her brother was in charge. He demanded so many things from people who needed help or healing, even from his own family members, his own sister from the same parents. This disturbed Alorlezuma very much and therefore she wanted to go to church where the pastors give you healing without charging you so much. Ameve admitted that many *afa* and *vodu* priests charge too much. Afrikania tells them to use a shrine to render service to the people, not to make money. Nevertheless, he added, 'the person has to bring something for the thing to work spiritually. It is not always exploitation.' A group discussion followed and after advice by various people, Alorlezuma decided to remain traditionalist.

Much attention was also paid to what to do as an Afrikania priest, how to establish a branch in a local community, how to make ATR respectable, hygienic, and beautiful and on how to bring it into public. On 20 August 2001 Ameve taught:

When sprinkling food, go to your boundaries; go outside so that people will see it. That's why we also have the loudspeaker, the incantations will sound and people will come out to see what we are doing. We don't want to hide, are proud of what we are doing.

Apart from the lectures, a few mornings and afternoons were spent on Afrikania liturgy, whereby students learned songs, slogans, and prayers, received preaching tips, and practiced to lead service. A few examples of discussions that ensued in the teaching process have been given above. Despite the obvious difference in authority between teachers and students – teachers always had the last say – the class room format did leave room for exchange of opinions and ideas. This rational, discursive interaction between well-informed individuals that was open to the general public, struck me as much closer to what Habermas had in mind when he wrote about the public sphere than to the mystical, secretive initiation into shrine knowledge. The latter was remarkably absent from Afrikania's teaching modes. In the next chapter I will come back to the gap between the teachings of the Afrikania Priesthood School and traditional spiritual knowledge and its modes of transmission. Here let me add that when I watched (and joined) the student priests taking turns to 'lead service,' with the liturgy sheet in hand, I could not resist the impression of a group of school pupils rehearsing a theatre play. They would need much more practice and passion to convince any audience that this was something real, that indeed, as was endlessly repeated during the lessons and rehearsals, *biribi wò ho*, there is something there.

The opening of this chapter described how, as part of the three day long celebrations marking Afrikania's 20th anniversary in March 2002, sixty new Afrikania priests and priestesses were publicly ordained into Afrikania priesthood as 'fighters for our tradition.' This was considered a major step or even victory in Afrikania's history of establishment, especially as the event took place in the mission's new building, which was inaugurated the next day. In front of the cameras and the audience, includ-

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ing leading scholars in culture and tradition and representatives of Hare Krishna and of Soka Gakkai (Buddhist) – the invited Christian churches did not show up – , the yet-to-be-ordained priests and priestesses were led away to a hidden place behind the building, where, as it was announced, they would be taken through the necessary initiation rituals, not to be witnessed by anyone else. When they reappeared before the audience, with a leaf in their mouth, they were taken through a ceremony replete with militant rhetoric and symbols vaguely referring to ‘traditional spiritual power.’ Ritual substances such as clay, herbs and holy water were applied to their bodies and ritual words whispered into their ears in order to infuse them with spiritual power. Their newly bought whisks were equally infused with magical words by one of the senior priests and a blue strip of cloth was tied to their white gown as a symbol of priestly authority. I couldn’t help thinking about what Ameve had told me not long before: that an Afrikania priest does not have any spiritual power, but that it is people’s belief that gives him or her power. Was this ceremony, designed by Ameve, not first of all meant to make people believe that Afrikania priests indeed ‘had something’? That despite all the newness and Christian-like formats of Afrikania, the movement was not at all a spiritually empty copy of Christianity? Anticipating on the discussion of authentication in the next chapter, I wish to suggest here that this public ordination was an occasion where Afrikania publicly made claim to spiritual power and staged otherness vis-à-vis Christianity with mystical substances and magical words.

The course and subsequent ordination of priests form part of Afrikania’s recent ‘outreach’ or ‘evangelisation’ programme of mobilising traditionalists and establishing branches throughout the country and abroad, linking up with local chiefs, traditional priests and healers, and building a network of traditionalist associations. By now there are about thirty Afrikania branches, mostly in the Volta Region, some in other parts of the country, and four in the US and Europe. Although the influence and sustainability of all these new rural branches can be debated, they are successful at least in bringing adherents of various cults together and drawing public attention to traditional religious festivals.

Spiritual consultation

Another innovation introduced by Osofo Ameve is the service of ‘spiritual consultation’ to the general public. Two mornings a week, Torgbe Kortor, an elderly *bokor* (shrine priest), and Osofo Fiakpui, a younger Afrikania priest, are present in the Afrikania building to receive and help people with all kinds of problems through *afa* divination and healing rituals. In one of the bare rooms downstairs, they spread a cloth on the tiled floor and arrange their ritual items. Interestingly, the service attracts mainly Christians and hardly any Afrikania members. The latter usually either have a shrine in their hometown where they seek spiritual consultation, or they are not interested in spiritual consultation at all. For Christians, as several of the people I met in the waiting hall told me, the step to the modern and civilised Afrikania building is smaller than to an ‘obscure’ place in a small village or in the bush. ‘This place is less frightening than a real shrine,’ a young lady from a charismatic church told me.

In the next chapter I will present some stories of people who came to Afrikania

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for consultation and examine the practices of divination and healing. Here, I argue that this recently introduced spiritual service, which attracts mainly Christians, reflects a much more general interest in the spiritual causes of life's problems and its spiritual solutions in Ghanaian religiosity, that has regained recognition by the strong public presence of charismatic-Pentecostal Christianity. So behind the obvious antagonism of African traditional religion and charismatic Pentecostalism in the public eye, there is a strong connection on a deeper level of relating to spiritual powers. In competition with various forms of spiritual healing offered by these churches, Afrikania now also provides 'spiritual consultation' and thus seems to get closer to the spiritual practices of shrines than before. This emphasis on spiritual practice is a recent trend in Afrikania, which, although still marginal, seems to be continued by Atsu Kove.

All night prayers

When I returned to Afrikania in March 2005, after Ameve's death and the installation of Osofo Atsu Kove as the new leader, one of the new developments Atsu Kove told me about was the introduction of a monthly 'all-night prayer meeting.' Initially he proposed a weekly meeting, every Friday night. That turned out too demanding – 'people are tired after a week's work' – and few people turned up each time. Now it is done every first Friday of the month. I attended one such meeting. In front of the building rented plastic chairs had been arranged in a square. Around nine pm, when the meeting was supposed to start, there was hardly anybody present yet. The musician present started singing on his own, accompanying himself with rattle and bell, until the rest of the drumming group trickled in, joined him with their drums and produced a volume that could keep the whole neighbourhood awake. Two guys put up a public address system with a powerful amplifier, giant loudspeakers, and two microphones. In the end, about fifty members came to join in the drumming, singing and dancing, the prime activity of the night. In contrast to the all night prayer meeting during Afrikania's 20th anniversary celebration, however, nobody got possessed.⁴⁰ At midnight a libation prayer was said by Atsu Kove, amplified into nightly Accra. Around 1 am the meeting was called to an end, the sound equipment stored, and people diverged to their homes. When I asked Atsu Kove later whether Afrikania followed the Christian trend of organising all night prayers, he fiercely denied this. Coming together at night to worship the deities with drumming and dancing is a traditional practice in shrines, he defended. 'The Christians have rather stolen it from us.'

As a result of the shifting relations between the state, religion, and the public sphere, Afrikania has come to face increasing competition with other religious groups while having to operate without any form of government backing. Ameve was well aware of the increasing need for public manifestation and during his time established a strong public presence for Afrikania in several ways. In order to be recognised as a legitimate, attractive and powerful religion, Afrikania has appropriated many symbols of being established as a church: a huge building, head offices including a copious office for the leader, a signboard indicating times of worship and healing, a 'ministry

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school,' printed cloth with name and emblem, official registration as a religious group, a constitution, membership cards, branches both in Ghana and abroad, and patronage by dignitaries. With the rapid rise and public appearance of charismatic churches, however, there has been a shift in what constitutes the format for religion. Whereas in the past Catholicism provided the format for Afrikania, it seems that now practices like evangelisation, spiritual healing, all night prayer, and the preoccupation with public visibility and audibility are increasingly being taken over from charismatic churches. I also understood from a colleague Afrikania researcher that spirit possession is increasingly being accommodated and ' "frenzied" possession is not an unusual occurrence during the Sunday meetings, both at the Sakaman Headquarters and the Arts Centre branch.'⁴¹ This would be a significant change, on which the next chapter will shine more light.

Conclusion: dilemmas of sameness and otherness

In this chapter I have addressed the ways in which the neo-traditionalist Afrikania Mission has transformed 'Afrikan Traditional Religion' in Ghana's Christian-dominated public sphere. First, I have shown how Afrikania continues the long conversation about 'African traditional religion' that started when the first Christian missionaries arrived on the West African coast. I have traced the genealogical input of the various African and European interlocutors in this conversation at different moments in history, in Afrikania's version of Afrikan Traditional Religion. Throughout history missionaries, travellers, ethnographers, colonial officials, Pan-Africanist intellectuals, African theologians, cultural revolutionaries, post-colonial state officials, educators, media producers, chiefs, shrine priests, and Pentecostal pastors have all produced their versions of 'African traditional religion.' Afrikania speaks to all of these.

Secondly, I have examined how at the current historical moment, where Afrikania's main and most powerful interlocutor is charismatic Pentecostalism, Afrikania's strategies of representing ATR have taken new directions in the context of the changing relations between the Ghanaian state, religion, and the mass media over the last decade. To briefly reiterate the argument of chapter 1, in Ghana's religious playing field, the balance of power has shifted from the old mission churches to the new type of independent charismatic-Pentecostal churches. Starting in the late seventies and peaking during the nineties, the phenomenal rise and spread, high popularity, and public dominance of this exclusionist type of Christianity has greatly impacted interreligious relations and tensions in the country, sometimes leading to outright clashes. Over the same period, Ghana's political scene has greatly transformed. Where the eighties were marked by Rawlings's Revolution, his subsequent military rule, and his anti-Western ideals of political and cultural self-consciousness and assertion, the nineties saw a return to democratic rule, a growing leaning towards neo-liberal capitalism, and a gradual 'pentecostalisation' of the state. As a result of these developments Ghana's public sphere has also seen a transformation from a state monopoly on the media, which where employed to voice out the nationalist cultural state ideology, to a liberalised media scene, which has seen the mushrooming of a myriad of private,

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commercial media channels and is dominated by charismatic-Pentecostal Christianity. Negative stereotyping of African traditional religion in public has intensified tensions between Christians and traditionalists. Sensational representations of 'juju' priests and practices flourish in the media and reinforce Pentecostal conceptions of traditional religion as demonic and feed both popular fear of and fascination with this evil Other.

In this nexus of politics, religion and the public sphere, the Afrikania Mission at first developed, in line with the Revolution and with its Pan-Africanist inspirational sources, a radical anti-Western cultural-religious discourse, directed against cultural and mental domination by the West and propagating African pride and self-consciousness. Now, in response to the rise and public dominance of an exclusionist and militant form of Christianity embodied by Africans themselves, Afrikania's struggle is in the first place directed at 'our own brothers and sisters' in the charismatic-Pentecostal churches and, with the 'pentecostalisation' of the state, at the government. Although Afrikania keeps stressing that it is not against any other religion, in speeches, preaching, and encounters, it implicitly identifies (charismatic) Christianity as the enemy, thus mirroring the widespread Pentecostal attitude towards traditional religion. Paradoxically, however, for their project of reforming traditional religion to gain public recognition the leaders of the movement have adopted a Christian derived form and concept of religion. Both its coherent doctrine and its form of worship are designed after Christianity. And it is the same charismatic type of Christianity that has pushed Afrikania to adopt a more anti-Christian attitude, that now also provides the format for what religion is and drives Afrikania to take over many of its practices and symbols. I argue that the current Pentecostal hegemony in Ghana's public sphere pushes Afrikania closer to the occupations of shrine priests and adherents with spirits and powers. Pentecostalism's incessant confirmation that African spirits are real and to be dealt with, and on which its success ultimately depends, serves as an incentive for Afrikania to also put more emphasis on the existence of spiritual powers and on ways of dealing with them, be they entirely different from Pentecostalism's ways. However, as will be worked out in the following chapters, Afrikania's increased foregrounding of spiritual power remains removed from shrine people's modes of relating to the spiritual.

In its project of publicly promoting African Traditional Religion, the Afrikania Mission faces a dilemma. Afrikania challenges the hegemonic thinking (in the media, in state policies, in the educational curriculum) about traditional religion that posits it as anti-modern antidote of Christianity and (Western) civilisation. Its leaders rather aim to show that ATR is also a very 'modern and civilised' religion. However, they can hardly escape the very framework they try to fight and find it very difficult, if not impossible, to present ATR as modern and African at the same time. To make 'the religion of Afrika' attractive and publicly presentable as an alternative to Christianity, to be respected as an established and civilised religion, and to counter the negative Christian-derived stereotypes of 'juju' and 'fetish' religion, the movement has to reframe it in Christian formats.

Afrikania's 'modern' reformulation of ATR, however, presents it with a problem of authentication. Within the discursive space that still opposes African tradition to Western modernity, Afrikania has to convince its public that this is not a 'modern

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invention,' but 'really Afrikan,' that is, 'uncontaminated' by Western, Christian influences, in order to retain legitimacy. This involves the outright denial of any Christian influence. Rather, if anything Afrikania does looks Christian, be it the concept of monotheism, a list of divine commandments, the practice of communion, or 'all night prayer' meetings, it claims that the Christians 'have rather stolen from us.' But Afrikania also presents itself as Other to Christianity and 'the West' by invoking and constructing distance, as in the ordination ceremony, and thus legitimates its claim to Africanness. In order to be modern and civilised, Afrikania has to invoke sameness and frame ATR in Christian formats, but in order to be perceived as authentically African, it has to stage otherness and represent itself as traditional antidote to modern Christianity.

Anthropology (and its partners missionary Christianity and colonialism) clearly left a legacy here. First, it divided the world into two: a modern, Western, Christian-based half and its Other, be it primitive, fetishist, traditional, non-Western, or whatever designation was in vogue. With its emphasis on cultural difference and comparison, it then made the non-Western world a patchwork of unique and authentic cultures. Freed from colonial rule and the colonial practice of studying culture to facilitate this rule, anthropological constructions of 'tradition,' 'culture,' but also 'religion' are eagerly taken up by the former colonial and anthropological subjects themselves as they offer them new possibilities to claim authority or legitimacy. Yet, as this chapter has shown, they also impose constraints that prove very hard to escape.

Notes to chapter 5

¹ Afrikania's use of K instead of C is a protest against being misrepresented on outsiders' terms, a claim to self-representation. According to present leaders the name Afrikania derives from the Twi phrase *ɛfiri kanea*, 'it comes from the light' (although this etymological interpretation seems to be more recent than the movement's name), hence their concern with the K. Ironically, the use of the K in writing indigenous languages originates from German missionaries, foremost Johannes Zimmerman and Johann Gottlieb Christaller of the Basel Mission, who worked in the Gold Coast from the 1850s (Schweizer 2000:89-90), and Diedrich Westermann of the Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft (Meyer 1999:59). They gave serious attention to putting local Gold Coast languages, especially Ga, Twi, and Ewe, in writing and had a profound impact on the spelling of and writing in these languages up till today. I use the spelling Afrikan and Afrika to denote Afrikania's imagination of what that is and to distinguish it from others', including anthropologists' ideas of what is African.

² For a discussion of the opposition of modern and traditional as an ideological product of modernity itself see, for example, Comaroff and Comaroff (1993), Geschiere, Meyer and Pels (2008), Knauff (2002), Piot (1999).

³ In the past the membership consisted mainly of adult men; women and children were conspicuously absent (Boogaard 1993). Now women make up half of the membership in Accra and much more in the rural branches, where membership seems to be growing fast. Afrikania's membership will be discussed in chapter 6.

⁴ 'Almighty father God, we call you this very moment, we thank you for bringing us together this

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morning to worship and glorify your name. You know everything you do is money matter, before you build is money matter, before you come to the service is money matter. And we gather together to put some few coins into this bowl. We call upon your holy name to bless this money so that whatever we are going to do with it, it is done in the correct way and profitable. We thank you, we glorify your name. Those who have got to put into this bowl, bless them to get more. Those who couldn't get, bless them so that next week when they are coming here, they will get enough to fill this bowl. Those who are not here today, bless them, so that next week when they are coming, their pocket will be full. We know you will do it for us, the way you did it for our forefathers. Amen-Ra!

⁵ See for example Van der Port (2004).

⁶ See also Van der Veer (2001) for a discussion of 'religion' as a nineteenth century concept produced by the colonial encounter.

⁷ In his thesis, 'The Changing Perspective of Wasa Amanfi Traditional Religion in Contemporary Africa' (1971), Damuah argued that 'even though there is only one theology, Africans must approach it not from a colonial perspective, but Afro-centrally, that is, from an African dimension' (quoted in Gyanfosu 2002:276).

⁸ Among Afrikania's main sources of inspiration were Pan-Africanist and Black emancipatory literature and figures like Edward Blyden, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Dubois, Louis Farrakhan, Kwame Nkrumah, Sheick Anta Diop, and Jomo Kenyatta (Boogaard 1993:321).

⁹ The government requires that all students in public schools up to the equivalent of senior secondary school level attend a daily devotional service, which is a Christian service including the recital of the Lord's Prayer and Bible reading (See Coe 2005). The libation debate will be discussed in chapter 7.

¹⁰ After Damuah's death, allegations appeared in the media about the spiritual causes of his death, pointing to the controversial nature of his biography and the movement he founded.

¹¹ Interview 4 March 2003.

¹² In Akan customary law, the (potential) successor of a deceased chief has to attend the chief's burial and, once he has been installed as the successor, organize his predecessor's funeral (see De Witte 2001). This is similar for Ewe and Ga chieftaincy, as Akan chieftaincy provided the model for the development of pre-colonial priestly leadership into chieftaincy with European colonisation.

¹³ In order to control the proliferation of new churches, in 1989 the Ghanaian government passed the Religious Bodies Registration Law (PNDC law 221) requiring all religious organisations in the country to register with National Commission for Culture. While the established churches fiercely criticised the law, the new, independent churches rather saw it as an opportunity to gain legitimacy and enhance their status and were eager to register. The Afrikania Mission was the only traditional religious group that registered. The law was repealed in 1992. See also Dovlo (2005).

¹⁴ The conflict did have an impact on my research. In anticipation of the final court ruling, Afrikania's library at the former mission house, containing a wealth of Afrikania pamphlets, documents, and books, inspirational sources, and audio-taped radio broadcasts, had been locked with two padlocks, one fixed by Ameve and the other by Quarm. Up till today this treasure remains firmly locked behind closed doors.

¹⁵ Osofo Quarm was drawn upon, however, to pour libation on behalf of traditional religion during the closing ceremony of an academic conference on traditional religion and leadership organised by the Institute of African Studies (University of Ghana) on 24 April 2002.

¹⁶ Interview 29 April 2002.

¹⁷ Ameve (Interview 29 April 2002): 'It was the committee which felt that the Afrikania head should

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be called His Holiness. His Holiness because the religions which have come to trade their religion here, instead of coexisting with the system they came to see, they took several steps to destroy it and labelled it as evil. Satanic. We must tell the world that there is nothing evil or satanic about it. We want to break that chain and call our religion Holy, so the leader of that religion is His Holiness. So the name is not for me, the name is for the religion.'

¹⁸ Conversation 13 March 2002.

¹⁹ The main objective of the Ghana Young Pioneers was 'to inculcate in the children of Ghana a feeling of pride in the country [and] to foster a sense of duty and of responsibility and above all a love for and a strong desire to serve the country' (Obiri Addo 1997:142).

²⁰ Interview Atsu Kove, 17 March 2005.

²¹ According to *afa* principles, every person has a *kpoli*, one of the 256 life signs that make up the *afa* geomantic system, and attached to this is one's 'beginning-beginning' in *dzogbe* (Rosenthal 1998:157 ff).

²² For a discussion of 'conversion' to ATR see chapter 6.

²³ Interview 17 March 2005.

²⁴ In 1996 the Afrikania Mission was registered in Togo.

²⁵ Other favourites included Kofi Antubam, *Ghana's Heritage of Culture* (1963), J.B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944), Cheick Anta Diop, *African Origin of Civilization, Myth or Reality?* (1974), *Precolonial Black Africa* (1987), G.M. James, *Stolen Legacy* (1954).

²⁶ Interview Ameve 16 July 2001.

²⁷ When I left the Afrikania Mission after my year of fieldwork, one of the priests subtly reminded me that 'we need a van with loudspeakers on top to use for our evangelism.'

²⁸ Interview 16 July 2001.

²⁹ 'Durbar' (from the Persian *darbar*) is originally a term used in India and Nepal for a ruler's court or ceremonial gathering. The British Empire brought the term to Ghana, where it is applied to the public ceremonial gathering of traditional rulers.

³⁰ When I came back to Accra in March 2005, the signboard had been vandalised. The paintings of the libation prayers had been removed and were found in the bush. Afrikania people did not know who were responsible for this, but suspected 'certain Christian groups.' Incidents like this, the demolition of the statue of the legendary Asante priest Okomfo Anokye in Kumasi by an Evangelist of the Christ Living Temple in 2001, and even the violation of shrines make clear that the presence of or reference to traditional religion in public spaces is highly controversial.

³¹ What brought Nana Drobo national fame was the claim in 1986 that his shrine had discovered a cure for AIDS (see Damuah n.d.: 92-93).

³² Torgbe Kortor explained it thus: 'Where we have taken you, that man there is called Legba. He is more or less the police for Afa cult. Legba is a police man, a divinity. That man is at the gate. If anything bad is coming, he prevents it from entering. In the shrines, he is always at the gate. If you are coming here he asks your spirit what do you want to do here? You don't see him, you don't see anything there. You cannot see him, but he is there. If we are celebrating anything, if we come to church, he is there, holding spiritual arms. The person who has the eye can see. That is why we don't have any evil around here.' As a protective deity Legba is found in various related cults in West-Africa and also in the Caribbean. He is also perceived as a messenger for other deities and a trickster (e.g. Geurts 2002:184ff; Preston Blier 1995).

³³ Interview 17 March 2005.

³⁴ Conversation 20 March 2002.

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³⁵ *Dipo* are puberty rites performed by the Krobo to mark the entry of young women into adulthood. See Steegstra 2004 for an in-depth study of *dipo*.

³⁶ Conversation 20 March 2002.

³⁷ Kwame Zulu Shabazz, personal correspondence, 16 July 2007.

³⁸ Email from Atsu Kove (11 May 2005): 'Concerning the court case between Afrikania Mission and the late Osofo Kofi Ameve's children, we were called at the court on 3rd May but they couldn't turn up. An action which shows that God and the ancestors are going to perform a miracle.'

³⁹ Afrikania's campaign in defence of *trokosi*, a traditional practice in some Ewe shrines that has come to be heavily critiqued as 'ritual slavery,' will be discussed in chapter seven.

⁴⁰ Atsu Kove told me that people may get possessed during the Friday night prayers, especially in times of crisis, such as the fight over the building. 'But sometimes the spirit just comes to dance and leaves again.'

⁴¹ Kwame Zulu Shabazz, personal correspondence, 16 July 2007. I have not been able to verify this information.

